Bodhinyana



Teachings of Ven. Ajahn Chah

Bodhinyana

A Collection of Dhamma Talks

by

AJAHN CHAH

(Phra Bodhinyana Thera)

Wat Pah Pong, Ubon Rajathani Province,

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Bodhinyana

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Dedicated to my grandparents

Gladys B. Sperry and G. Lester Sperry,

and Mumu Ida Binford and Bernard C. Binford.

May you and all beings everywhere know true happiness.

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PREFACE TO THE 2000 EDITION

'Bodhinyana' was the first collection of talks by Ven. Ajahn Chah to be translated and published by his Western students. Since its first publication in 1979, it has been reprinted many times. However, it has been out of print for several years now. It is therefore a delight to be able to make these teachings available once again.

Bodhinyana (the title is taken from Ajahn Chah's honorific name, meaning "enlightened knowledge") was a group effort by many people and each translator has attempted to convey the feeling of Ajahn Chah's teaching along with the meaning. There are inherent difficulties in trying to translate from Thai to English. Much of the repetition that is the art of oral instruction has been omitted, but hopefully not to the extent that the emphasis of the teacher has been lost.

Pali words absorbed into the Thai language have, in the course of time, acquired additional meanings: e.g. the Thai 'arome' refers to the Pali 'arammana' — sense object or mental impression, but its common meaning is 'mood' or 'emotion'. The Venerable Ajahn uses these words in both ways and it has been translated accordingly. Similarly, the word for mind and heart are the same in Thai and it has been variously rendered in different contexts. Finding the middle way between a dull, over-literal approach and a more flowing, but less precise rendering hasn't always been easy. Each of the various translators has compromised in different ways. Hopefully they have managed to bring out both the clear simplicity, the directness and the humor of these

talks on the one hand and, at the same time, the profundity that underlies and inspires them.

May these teachings provide nourishing contemplation for seekers of the Way and help to establish the heart which is awake, pure and peaceful.

May all beings be free from suffering.

The Sangha,
Abhayagiri Monastery

AJAHN CHAH

Ajahn Chah was born into a large and comfortable family in a rural village in Northeast Thailand. He was ordained as a novice in early youth and on reaching the age of twenty took higher ordination as a monk. As a young monk he studied some basic Dhamma, Discipline and scriptures. Later he practised meditation under the guidance of several of the local meditation masters in the Forest Tradition. He wandered for a number of years in the style of an ascetic monk, sleeping in forests, caves and cremation grounds, and spent a short but enlightening period with Ajahn Mun, one of the most famous and respected Thai meditation masters of this century.

After many years of travel and practice, he was invited to settle in a thick forest grove near the village of his birth. This grove was uninhabited, known as a place of cobras, tigers and ghosts, thus being as he said, the perfect location for a forest monk. Around Ajahn Chah a large monastery formed as more and more monks, nuns and lay-people came to hear his teachings and stay on to practise with him. Now there are disciples teaching in more than a hundred and fifty mountain and forest branch temples throughout Thailand and in the West.

Although Ajahn Chah passed away in 1992, the training which he established is still carried on at Wat Pah Pong and its branches. There is usually group meditation twice a day and sometimes a talk by the senior teacher, but the heart of the meditation is the way of life. The monastics do manual work, dye and sew their own robes, make most of their own requisites and keep the monastery buildings and

grounds in immaculate shape. They live extremely simply following the ascetic precepts of eating once a day from the almsbowl and limiting their possessions and robes. Scattered throughout the forest are individual huts where monks and nuns live and meditate in solitude, and where they practise walking meditation on cleared paths under the trees.

Discipline is strict, enabling one to lead a simple and pure life in a harmoniously regulated community where virtue, meditation and understanding may be skillfully and continuously cultivated.

Ajahn Chah's simple yet profound style of teaching had a special appeal to Westerners, and many came to study and practise with him, quite a few for many years. In 1975 Wat Pah Nanachat was established near Wat Pah Pong as a special training monastery for the growing numbers of Westerners interested in undertaking monastic life. Since then Ajahn Chah's large following of senior Western disciples has begun the work of spreading the Dhamma to the West. Ajahn Chah himself travelled twice to Europe and North America, and helped to establish the first branch monastery in Sussex, England. Since then other monasteries have grown up in England, France, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Italy and the U.S.A.

Wisdom is a way of living and being, and Ajahn Chah endeavored to preserve the simple monastic life-style in order that people may study and practise Dhamma in the present day.

Ajahn Chah's wonderfully simple style of teaching can be deceptive. It is often only after we have heard something many times that suddenly our minds are ripe and somehow the teaching takes on a much deeper meaning. His skillful means in tailoring his explanations of Dhamma to time and place, and to the understanding and sensitivity

of his audience, was marvelous to see. Sometimes on paper though, it can make him seem inconsistent or even self-contradictory. At such times the reader should remember that these words are a record of a living experience. Similarly, if the teachings may seem to vary at times from tradition, it should be borne in mind that the Venerable Ajahn speaks always from the heart, from the depths of his own meditative experience.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma-Sambuddhassa

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FRAGMENTS OF A TEACHING*

All of you have believed in Buddhism for many years now through hearing about the Buddhist teachings from many sources — especially from various monks and teachers. In some cases Dhamma is taught in very broad and vague terms to the point where it is difficult to know how to put it into practice in daily life. In other instances Dhamma is taught in high language or special jargon to the point where most people find it difficult to understand, especially if the teaching is done too literally from the scriptures. Lastly there is Dhamma taught in a balanced way, neither too vague nor too profound, neither too broad nor too esoteric — just right for the listener to understand and practise to personally benefit from the teachings. Today I would like to share with you teachings of the sort I have often used to instruct my disciples in the past; teachings which I hope may possibly be of personal benefit to those of you here listening today.

One Who Wishes to Reach the Buddha-Dhamma

One who wishes to reach the Buddha-Dhamma must firstly be one who has faith or confidence as a foundation. We must understand the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma as follows:

Buddha: the One-Who-Knows, the one who has purity, radiance and peace in the heart.

* given to the lay communty at Wat Pah Pong in 1972

Dhamma: the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.

Therefore, one who is to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is one who cultivates and develops morality, concentration and wisdom within themselves.

Walking the Path of Buddha-Dhamma

Naturally people who wish to reach their home are not those who merely sit and think of travelling. They must actually undertake the process of travelling step by step, and in the right direction as well, in order to finally reach home. If they take the wrong path they may eventually run into difficulties such as swamps or other obstacles which are hard to get around. Or they may run into dangerous situations in this wrong direction, thereby possibly never reaching home.

Those who reach home can relax and sleep comfortably — home is a place of comfort for body and mind. Now they have really reached home. But if the traveller only passed by the front of their home or only walked around it, they would not receive any benefit from having travelled all the way home.

In the same way, walking the path to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is something each one of us must do individually ourselves, for no one can do it for us. And we must travel along the proper path of morality, concentration and wisdom until we find the blessings of purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind that are the fruits of travelling the path.

However, if one only has knowledge of books and scriptures, sermons and *sutas**, that is, only knowledge of the map or plans for

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* see glossary

the journey, even in hundreds of lives one will never know purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind. Instead one will just waste time and never get to the real benefits of practice. Teachers are those who only point out the direction of the Path. After listening to the teachers, whether or not we walk the Path by practising ourselves, and thereby reap the fruits of practice, is strictly up to each one of us.

Another way to look at it is to compare practice to a bottle of medicine a doctor leaves for their patient. On the bottle is written detailed instructions on how to take the medicine but, no matter how many hundred times the patient reads the directions, they are bound to die if that is all they do. They will gain no benefit from the medicine. And before they die, they may complain bitterly that the doctor wasn't any good, that the medicine didn't cure them. They will think that the doctor was a fake or that the medicine was worthless, yet they have only spent their time examining the bottle and reading the instructions. They haven't followed the advice of the doctor and taken the medicine.

However, if the patient actually follows the doctor's advice and takes the medicine regularly as prescribed, they will recover. And if they are very ill, it will be necessary to take a lot of medicine, whereas if they are only mildly ill, only a little medicine will be needed to finally cure them. The fact that we must use a lot of medicine is a result of the severity of our illness. It's only natural and you can see it for yourself with careful consideration.

Doctors prescribe medicine to eliminate disease from the body. The Teachings of the Buddha are prescribed to cure disease of the mind, to bring it back to its natural healthy state. So the Buddha can be considered to be a doctor who prescribes cures for the ills of the mind. He is, in fact, the greatest doctor in the world.

Mental ills are found in each one of us without exception. When you see these mental ills, does it not make sense to look to the Dhamma as support, as medicine to cure your ills? Travelling the path of the Buddha-Dhamma is not done with the body. You must travel with the mind or heart to reach the benefits. We can divide these travellers into three groups:

First Level: this is comprised of those who understand that they must practise themselves, and know how to do so. They take the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha as their refuge and have resolved to practise diligently according to the teachings. These persons have discarded merely following customs and traditions, and instead use reason to examine for themselves the nature of the world. These are the group of 'Buddhist practitioners'.

Middle Level: this group is comprised of those who have practised until they have an unshakable faith in the teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. They also have penetrated to the understanding of the true nature of all compounded things. These persons gradually reduce clinging and attachment. They do not hold onto things and their minds reach deep understanding of the Dhamma. Depending upon the degree of non-attachment and wisdom they are progressively known as Stream-Enterers, Once-Returners and Non-Returners, or simply, Noble Ones.

Highest Level: this is the group of those whose practice has led them to the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. They are above the world, free of the world and free of all attachment and clinging. They are known as *Arahants** or Perfected Ones, the highest level of the Noble Ones.

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* see glossary

How to Purify One's Morality

Morality is restraint and discipline of body and speech. On the formal level this is divided into classes of precepts for lay people and for monks and nuns. However, to speak in general terms, there is one basic characteristic — that is intention. When we are mindful or self-recollected, we have right intention. Practising mindfulness (*sati**) and self-recollection (*sampajañña**) will generate good morality.

It is only natural that when we put on dirty clothes and our bodies are dirty, that our minds too will feel uncomfortable and depressed. However, if we keep our bodies clean and wear clean, neat clothes, it makes our minds light and cheerful. So too, when morality is not preserved, our bodily actions and speech are soiled, and this is a cause for making the mind unhappy, distressed and heavy. We are separated from right practice and this prevents us from penetrating into the essence of the Dhamma in our minds. The wholesome bodily actions and speech themselves depend on mind, properly trained, since mind orders body and speech. Therefore, we must continue practice by training our minds.

Practice of Concentration Training (*Samadhi)**

The training in concentration is practice to make the mind firm and steady. This brings about peacefulness of mind. Usually our untrained minds are moving and restless, hard to control and manage. Mind follows sense distractions wildly just like water flowing this way and that, seeking the lowest level. Agriculturalists and engineers, though, know how to control water so that it is of greater use to human society. People are clever, they know how to dam water, make large

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* see glossary

reservoirs and canals — all of this merely to channel water and make it more useable. In addition, the water stored becomes a source of electrical power and light — further benefits from controlling its flow so that it doesn't run wild and eventually settle into a few low spots, its usefulness wasted.

So, too, the mind which is dammed and controlled, trained constantly, will be of immeasurable benefit. The Buddha himself taught, "The mind that has been controlled brings true happiness, so train your minds well for the highest of benefits." Similarly, the animals we see around us — elephants, horses, cattle, buffalo, etc.— must be trained before they can be useful for work. Only after they have been trained is their strength of benefit to us.

In the same way, the mind that has been trained will bring many times the blessings of that of an untrained mind. The Buddha and his noble disciples all started out in the same way as us — with untrained minds; but afterwards look how they became the subjects of reverence for us all, and see how much benefit we can gain through their teaching. Indeed, see what benefit has come to the entire world from these beings who have gone through the training of the mind to reach the freedom beyond. The mind controlled and trained is better equipped to help us in all professions, in all situations. The disciplined mind will keep our lives balanced, make work easier and develop and nurture reason to govern our actions. In the end our happiness will increase accordingly as we follow the proper mind training.

The training of the mind can be done in many ways, with many different methods. The method which is most useful and which can be practised by all types of people is known as 'mindfulness of breathing'. It is the developing of mindfulness on the in-breath and the out-breath.

In this monastery we concentrate our attention on the tip of the nose and develop awareness of the in- and out-breaths with the mantra word *'BUD-DHO'*. If the meditator wishes to use another word, or simply be mindful of the breath moving in and out, this is also fine. Adjust the practice to suit yourself. The essential factor in the meditation is that the noting or awareness of the breath be kept up in the present moment so that one is mindful of each in-breath and each out-breath just as it occurs. While doing walking meditation we try to be constantly mindful of the sensation of the feet touching the ground.

This practice of meditation must be pursued as continuously as possible in order for it to bear fruit. Don't meditate for a short time one day and then in one or two weeks, or even a month, meditate again. This will not bring good results. The Buddha taught us to practise often, to practise diligently, that is, to be as continuous as we can in the practice of mental training. To practise meditation we should also find a suitably quiet place free from distractions. In gardens or under shady trees in our back yards, or in places where we can be alone are suitable environments. If we are a monk or nun we should find a suitable hut, a quiet forest or cave. The mountains offer exceptionally suitable places for practice.

In any case, wherever we are, we must make an effort to be continuously mindful of breathing in and breathing out. If the attention wanders to other things, try to pull it back to the object of concentration. Try to put away all other thoughts and cares. Don't think about anything — just watch the breath. If we are mindful of thoughts as soon as they arise and keep diligently returning to the meditation subject, the mind will become quieter and quieter. When the mind is peaceful and concentrated, release it from the breath as the object of concentration.

Now begin to examine the body and mind comprised of the five *khandhas** ('groups' of existence comprising body and mind): material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Examine these five khandhas as they come and go. You will see clearly that they are impermanent, that this impermanence makes them unsatisfactory and undesirable, and that they come and go of their own — there is no 'self' running things. There is to be found only nature moving according to cause and effect. All things in the world fall under the characteristics of instability, unsatisfactoriness and being without a permanent ego or soul. Seeing the whole of existence in this light, attachment and clinging to the khandhas will gradually be reduced. This is because we see the true characteristics of the world. We call this the arising of wisdom.

The Arising of Wisdom (*Pañña**)

Wisdom is to see the truth of the various manifestations of body and mind. When we use our trained and concentrated minds to examine the five khandhas, we will see clearly that both body and mind are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self. In seeing all compounded things with wisdom we do not cling or grasp. Whatever we receive, we receive mindfully. We are not excessively happy. When things of ours break up or disappear, we are not unhappy and do not suffer painful feelings — for we see clearly the impermanent nature of all things. When we encounter illness and pain of any sort, we have equanimity because our minds have been well trained. The true refuge is the trained mind.

All of this is known as the wisdom which knows the true

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* see glossary

characteristics of things as they arise. Wisdom arises from mindfulness and concentration. Concentration arises from a base of morality or virtue. All of these things, morality, concentration and wisdom, are so inter-related that it is not really possible to separate them. In practice it can be looked at in this way: first there is the disciplining of the mind to be attentive to breathing. This is the arising of morality. When mindfulness of breathing is practised continuously until the mind is quiet, this is the arising of concentration. Then examination showing the breath as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, and the subsequent non-attachment, is the arising of wisdom. Thus the practice of mindfulness of breathing can be said to be a course for the development of morality, concentration and wisdom. They all come together.

When morality, concentration and wisdom are all developed, we call this practising the Eightfold Path which the Buddha taught as our only way out of suffering. The Eightfold Path is above all others because if properly practised it leads directly to *Nibbana**, to peace. We can say that this practice reaches the Buddha-Dhamma truly and precisely.

Benefits from Practice

When we have practised meditation as explained above, the fruits of practice will arise in the following three stages:

First, for those practitioners who are at the level of 'Buddhists by faith', there will arise increasing faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This faith will become the real inner support of each person. Also, they will understand the cause-and-effect nature of all things; that

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* see glossary

wholesome action brings wholesome results and that unwholesome action brings unwholesome results. So for such a person there will be a great increase in happiness and mental peace.

Second, those who have reached the noble attainments of Stream-Enterer, Once-Returner or Non-Returner, have unshakable faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. They are joyful and are pulled towards Nibbana.

Third, for those Arahants or Perfected Ones, there will be the happiness free from all suffering. These are the Buddhas, free from the world, complete in the practice of the spiritual path.

We have all had the good fortune to be born as human beings and to hear the teaching of the Buddha. This is an opportunity that millions of other beings do not have. Therefore do not be careless or heedless. Hurry and develop wholesomeness, do good and follow the path of practice in the beginning, in the middle and in the highest levels. Don't let time roll by unused and without purpose. Try to reach the truth of the Buddha's teachings even today. Let me close with a Lao folk-saying: *"Many rounds of merriment and pleasure past, soon it will be evening. Drunk with tears now, rest and see, soon it will be too late to finish the journey."*

A GIFT OF DHAMMA*

I am happy that you have taken this opportunity to come and visit Wat Pah Pong, and to see your son who is a monk here, however I'm sorry that I have no gift to offer you. France already has so many material things, but of Dhamma there's very little. Having been there and seen for myself, there isn't really any Dhamma there which could lead to peace and tranquillity. There are only things which continually make one's mind confused and troubled.

France is already materially prosperous, it has so many things to offer which are sensually enticing — sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. However, people unaware of Dhamma only become confused by them. So today I will offer you some Dhamma to take back to France as a gift from Wat Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat.

What is Dhamma? Dhamma is that which can cut through the problems and difficulties of human beings, gradually reducing them to nothing. That's what is called Dhamma and that's what should be studied throughout our daily lives so that when some mental impression arises in us, we'll be able to deal with it and go beyond it.

Problems are common to us all whether living here in Thailand or in other countries. If we don't know how to solve them, we'll always be subject to suffering and distress. That which solves problems is wisdom and to have wisdom we must develop and train the mind.

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* A Discourse delivered to the assembly of Western Monks, Novices and Lay-disciples at Wat Pah Nanachat, Ubon, on 10th October, 1977.
This Discourse was offered to the parents of one of the monks on the occasion of their visit from France.

The subject of practice isn't far away at all, it's right here in our body and mind. Westerners and Thais are the same; they both have a body and mind. A confused body and mind means a confused person and a peaceful body and mind, a peaceful person.

Actually, the mind, like rain water, is pure in its natural state. If we were to drop green coloring into clear rainwater, however, it would turn green. If yellow coloring, it would turn yellow.

The mind reacts similarly. When a comfortable mental impression 'drops' into the mind, the mind is comfortable. When the mental impression is uncomfortable, the mind is uncomfortable. The mind becomes 'tinted', just like the colored water.

When clear water contacts yellow, it turns yellow. When it contacts green, it turns green. It will change color every time. Actually, that water which is green or yellow is naturally clean and clear. This is also the natural state of the mind, clean and pure and unconfused. It becomes confused only because it pursues mental impressions; it gets lost in its moods.

Let me explain more clearly. Right now we are sitting in a peaceful forest. Here, if there's no wind, a leaf remains still. When a wind blows it flaps and flutters. The mind is similar to that leaf. When it contacts a mental impression, it, too, 'flaps and flutters' according to the nature of that mental impression. And the less we know of Dhamma, the more the mind will continually pursue mental impressions. Feeling happy, it succumbs to happiness. Feeling suffering, it succumbs to suffering. It's constant confusion!

In the end people become neurotic. Why? Because they don't know. They just follow their moods and don't know how to look after their own minds. When the mind has no one to look after it, it's like a

child without a mother or father to take care of them. An orphan has no refuge and, without a refuge, they are very insecure.

Likewise, if the mind is not looked after, if there is no training or maturation of character with right understanding, things get really troublesome.

The method of training the mind which I will give you today is called *Kammathana**. *'Kamma'* means 'action' and *'thana'* means 'base'. In Buddhism it is the method of making the mind peaceful and tranquil. It's for you to use in training the mind and with the trained mind to investigate the body.

Our being is composed of two parts: one is the body, the other, the mind. There are only these two parts. What is called 'the body', is that which can be seen with our physical eyes. 'The mind', on the other hand, has no physical aspect. The mind can only be *seen* with the 'internal eye' or the 'eye of the mind'. These two things, body and mind, are in a constant state of turmoil.

What is the mind? The mind isn't really any 'thing'. Conventionally speaking, it's that which sees or senses. That which senses, receives and experiences all mental impressions is called 'mind'. Right at this moment there is mind. As I am speaking to you, the mind acknowledges what I am saying. Sounds enter through the ear and you know what is being said. That which experiences this is called 'mind'.

This mind doesn't have any self or substance. It doesn't have any form. It just experiences mental activities — that's all! If we teach this mind to have right view, this mind won't have any problems. It will be at ease.

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* see glossary

The mind is mind. Mental objects are mental objects. Mental objects are not the mind; the mind is not mental objects. In order to clearly understand our minds and the mental objects in our minds, we say that the mind is that which receives the mental objects which pop into it.

When these two things, mind and its object, come into contact with each other, they give rise to feelings. Some are good, some bad, some cool, some hot, all kinds. Without wisdom to deal with these feelings, however, the mind will be troubled.

Meditation is the way of developing the mind so that it may be a base for the arising of wisdom. Here the breath is a physical foundation. We call it *anapanasati** or 'mindfulness of breathing'. Here we make breathing our mental object. We take this object of meditation because it's the simplest and because it has been the heart of meditation since ancient times.

When a good occasion arises to do sitting meditation, sit cross-legged: right leg on top of the left leg, right hand on top of the left hand. Keep your back straight and erect. Say to yourself, "Now I will let go of all my burdens and concerns." You don't want anything that will cause you worry. Let go of all concerns for the time being.

Now fix your attention on the breath. Then breathe in and breathe out. In developing awareness of breathing, don't intentionally make the breath long or short. Neither make it strong or weak. Just let it flow normally and naturally. Mindfulness and self-awareness, arising from the mind, will know the in-breath and the out-breath.

Be at ease. Don't think about anything. No need to think of this or that. The only thing you have to do is fix your attention on the

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* see glossary

breathing in and breathing out. You have nothing else to do but that! Keep your mindfulness fixed on the in- and out-breaths as they occur. Be aware of the beginning, middle and end of each breath. On inhalation, the beginning of the breath is at the nose tip, the middle at the heart, and the end in the abdomen. On exhalation, it's just the reverse: the beginning of the breath is in the abdomen, the middle at the heart, and the end at the nose tip. Develop the awareness of the breath: 1. at the nose tip; 2. at the heart; 3. in the abdomen. Then in reverse: 1. in the abdomen; 2. at the heart; 3. at the nose tip.

Focusing the attention on these three points will relieve all worries. Just don't think of anything else. Keep your attention on the breath. Perhaps other thoughts will enter the mind. It will take up other themes and distract you. Don't be concerned. Just take up the breathing again as your object of attention. The mind may get caught up in judging and investigating your moods, but continue to practise, being constantly aware of the beginning, middle and the end of each breath.

Eventually, the mind will be aware of the breath at these three points all the time. When you do this practice for some time, the mind and body will get accustomed to the work. Fatigue will disappear. The body will feel lighter and the breath will become more and more refined. Mindfulness and self-awareness will protect the mind and watch over it.

We practise like this until the mind is peaceful and calm, until it is one. One means that the mind will be completely absorbed in the breathing, that it doesn't separate from the breath. The mind will be unconfused and at ease. It will know the beginning, middle and end of the breath and remain steadily fixed on it.

Then when the mind is peaceful, we fix our attention on the in-breath and out-breath at the nose tip only. We don't have to follow it up and down to the abdomen and back. Just concentrate on the tip of the nose where the breath comes in and goes out.

This is called 'calming the mind', making it relaxed and peaceful. When tranquillity arises, the mind stops; it stops with its single object, the breath. This is what's known as making the mind peaceful so that wisdom may arise.

This is the beginning, the foundation of our practice. You should try to practise this every single day, wherever you may be. Whether at home, in a car, lying or sitting down, you should be mindfully aware and watch over the mind constantly.

This is called mental training and should be practised in all the four postures. Not just sitting, but standing, walking and lying down as well. The point is that we should know what the state of the mind is at each moment, and to be able to do this, we must be constantly mindful and aware. Is the mind happy or suffering? Is it confused? Is it peaceful? Getting to know the mind in this manner allows it to become tranquil and when it does become tranquil, wisdom will arise.

With the tranquil mind investigate the meditation subject of the body, from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet, then back up again to the head. Do this over and over again. Look at and see the hair of the head, hair of the body, the nails, teeth and skin. In this meditation we will see that this whole body is composed of four 'elements': earth, water, fire and air.

The hard and solid parts of our body make up the earth element; the liquid and flowing parts, the water element. Winds that pass up and down our body constitute the air element, and the heat in our body,

the fire element.

Taken together, they compose what we call a 'human being'. However, when the body is broken down into its component parts, only these four elements remain. The Buddha taught that there is no 'being' per se, no human, no Thai, no Westerner, no person, but that ultimately there are only these four elements — that's all! We assume that there is a person or a 'being' but, in reality, there isn't anything of the sort.

Whether taken separately as earth, water, fire and air, or taken together, labelled as a 'human being', they're all impermanent, subject to suffering and not-self. They are all unstable, uncertain and in a state of constant change — not stable for a single moment!

Our body is unstable, altering and changing constantly. Hair changes, nails change, teeth change, skin changes — everything changes, completely.

Our mind, too, is always changing. It isn't a self or substance. It isn't really 'us', not really 'them', although it may think so. Maybe it will think about killing itself. Maybe it will think of happiness or of suffering — all sorts of things! It's unstable. If we don't have wisdom and we believe this mind of ours, it'll lie to us continually. And we will alternately suffer and be happy.

The mind is an uncertain thing. This body is uncertain. Together they are impermanent. Together they are a source of suffering. Together they are devoid of self. These, the Buddha pointed out, are neither a being, nor a person, nor a self, nor a soul, neither us, nor them. They are merely elements: earth, water, fire and air. Just elements.

When the mind sees this, it will rid itself of attachment which

holds that 'I' am beautiful, 'I' am good, 'I' am evil, 'I' am suffering, 'I' have, 'I' this or 'I' that. You will experience a state of unity, for you'll have seen that all of humankind is basically the same. There is no 'I'. There are only elements.

When you contemplate and see impermanence, suffering and not-self, there will no longer be clinging to a self, a being, I or he or she. The mind which sees this will give rise to *nibbida**, disenchantment and dispassion. It will see all things only as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self.

The mind then stops. The mind is Dhamma. Greed, hatred and delusion will then diminish and recede little by little until finally there is only mind — just the pure mind. This is called 'practising meditation'.

Thus, I ask you to receive this gift of Dhamma which I offer you to study and contemplate in your daily lives. Please accept this Dhamma teaching from Wat Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat as an inheritance handed down to you. All of the monks here, including your son, and all the teachers, make you an offering of this Dhamma to take back to France with you. It will show you the way to peace of mind; it will render your mind calm and unconfused. Your body may be in turmoil, but your mind will not. Those in the world may be confused, but you will not be. Even though there is confusion in your country, you will not be confused because the mind will have *seen*; the mind is Dhamma. This is the right path, the proper way.

May you remember this teaching in the future.

May you be well and happy.

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* see glossary

DHAMMA NATURE*

Sometimes, when a fruit tree is in bloom, a breeze stirs and scatters its blossoms to the ground. A wind blows and some of them, too, fall! Still others may become fruit nearly ripe, or some even fully ripe, before they fall.

And so it is with people. Like flowers and fruit in the wind they, too, fall in different stages of life. Some people die while still in the womb, others live for only a few days after birth. Some people live for a few years then die, never having reached maturity. Men and women die in their youth. Still others reach a ripe old age before they die.

When reflecting upon people, consider the nature of the fruit in the wind: both are very uncertain.

This uncertain nature of things can also be seen in the monastic life. Some people come to the monastery intending to ordain but change their minds and leave, some with heads already shaved. Others are already novices; then they decide to leave. Some ordain for only one Rains Retreat then disrobe. Just like fruit in the wind — all very uncertain.

Our minds are also similar. A mental impression arises, draws and pulls at the mind; then the mind falls — just like fruit.

The Buddha understood this uncertain nature of things. He observed the phenomenon of fruit in the wind and reflected upon the monks and novices who were his disciples. He found that they, too,

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* Delivered to the Western disciples at Wat Pah Nanachat during the Rains Retreat 1977, just after one of the senior monks had disrobed and left the monastery

were essentially of the same nature — uncertain! How could it be otherwise? This is just the way of all things.

Thus, for one who is practising with awareness, it isn't necessary to have someone to advise and teach all that much to be able to see and understand. An example is the case of the Buddha who, in a previous life, was King Janaka Kumara. He didn't need to study very much. All he had to do was observe a mango tree.

One day, while visiting a park with his retinue of ministers, from atop his elephant, he spied some mango trees heavily laden with ripe fruit. Not being able to stop at that time, he determined in his mind to return later to partake of some. Little did he know, however, that his ministers, coming along behind, would greedily gather them all up; that they would use poles to knock them down, beating and breaking the branches and tearing and scattering the leaves.

Returning in the evening to the mango grove, the king already imagining in his mind the delicious taste of the mangoes, suddenly discovered that they were all gone, completely finished! And not only that, but the branches and leaves had been thoroughly thrashed and scattered.

The king, quite disappointed and upset, then noticed another mango tree nearby with its leaves and branches still intact. He wondered why. He then realized it was because that tree had no fruit. If a tree has no fruit nobody disturbs it and so its leaves and branches are not damaged. This lesson kept him absorbed in thought all the way back to the palace: "It is unpleasant, troublesome and difficult to be a king. It requires that he have constant concern for all his subjects. What if there are attempts to attack, plunder and seize parts of his kingdom?" He could not rest peacefully; even in his sleep he was disturbed by bad

dreams.

He saw in his mind, once again, the mango tree without fruit and its undamaged leaves and branches. "If we become similar to that mango tree," he thought, "our 'leaves' and 'branches' too, would not be damaged."

In his chamber he sat and meditated. Finally, he decided to become a monk, having been inspired by this lesson of the mango tree. He compared himself to that mango tree and concluded that if one didn't become involved in the ways of the world, one would be truly independent, free from worries or difficulties. The mind would be untroubled. Reflecting thus, he became a wandering monk.

From then on, wherever he went, when asked who his teacher was, he would answer, "A mango tree." He didn't need to receive teaching all that much. A mango tree was the cause of his awakening to the *opanayiko*-dhamma*, the teaching leading inwards. And with this awakening, he became a monk, one who has few concerns, is content with little, and who delights in solitude. His royal status given up, his mind was finally at peace.

In this story the Buddha was a Bodhisattva who developed his practice in this way continuously. Like the Buddha as King Janaka Kumara, we, too, should look around us and be observant because everything in the world is ready to teach us.

With even a little intuitive wisdom, we will then be able to see clearly through the ways of the world. We will come to understand that everything in the world is a teacher. Trees and vines, for example, can all reveal the true nature of reality. With wisdom there is no need to question anyone, no need to study. We can learn from Nature enough

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* see glossary

to be enlightened, as in the story of King Janaka Kumara, because everything follows the way of Truth. It does not diverge from Truth.

Associated with wisdom are self-composure and restraint which, in turn, can lead to further insight into the ways of Nature. In this way, we will come to know the ultimate truth of everything being *anicca-dukkha-anatta**. Take trees, for example; all trees upon the earth are equal, are one, when seen through the reality of 'anicca-dukkha-anatta'. First they come into being, then grow and mature, constantly changing, until they finally die as every tree must.

In the same way, people and animals are born, grow and change during their lifetimes until they eventually die. The multitudinous changes which occur during this transition from birth to death show the way of Dhamma. That is to say, all things are impermanent, having decay and dissolution as their natural condition. If we have awareness and understanding, if we study with wisdom and mindfulness, we will see Dhamma as reality. Thus, we will see people as constantly being born, changing and finally passing away. Everyone is subject to the cycle of birth and death, and because of this, everyone in the universe is as one being. Thus, seeing one person clearly and distinctly is the same as seeing every person in the world.

In the same way, everything is Dhamma. Not only the things we see with our physical eye, but also the things we see in our minds. A thought arises, then changes and passes away. It is '*nama-dhamma*', simply a mental impression that arises and passes away. This is the real nature of the mind. Altogether, this is the Noble Truth of Dhamma. If one doesn't look and observe in this way, one doesn't really *see*! If

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* anicca-dukkha-anatta: the three characteristics of existence, namely: impermance/instability, suffering/unsatisfactoriness, and not-self/impersonality.

one does see, one will have the wisdom to listen to the Dhamma as proclaimed by the Buddha.

Where is the Buddha?
The Buddha is in the Dhamma.
Where is the Dhamma?
The Dhamma is in the Buddha.
Right here, now!
Where is the Sangha?
The Sangha is in the Dhamma.

The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha exist in our minds, but we have to see it clearly. Some people just pick this up casually saying, "Oh! The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha exist in my mind." Yet their own practice is not in accord with Truth. It is thus not possible that the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha should be found in their minds, because the mind must first be that mind which knows the Dhamma.

Bringing everything back to this point of Dhamma, we will come to know that, in the world, Truth does exist, and thus it is possible for us to practise to realize it.

For instance, nama-dhamma: feelings, thoughts, imagination, etc., are all uncertain. When anger arises, it grows and changes and finally disappears. Happiness too, arises, grows and changes and finally disappears. They are empty. They are not really any 'thing'. Internally, there is this body and mind. Externally, there are trees, vines and all manner of things which display this universal law of uncertainty.

Whether a tree, a mountain or an animal, it's all Dhamma, everything is Dhamma. Where is this Dhamma? Speaking simply, that which is not Dhamma doesn't exist. Dhamma is Nature. This is

called the '*sacca-dhamma*', the True Dhamma. If one sees Nature, one sees Dhamma; if one sees Dhamma, one sees Nature. Seeing Nature, one knows the Dhamma.

And so, what is the use of a lot of study when the ultimate reality of life, in its every moment, in its every act, is just an endless cycle of births and deaths? If we are mindful and clearly aware when in all postures (sitting, standing, walking and lying down) then self-knowledge is ready to be born. That is, knowing the truth of Dhamma already in existence right here and now.

At present, the Buddha, the *real* Buddha, is still living, for he is the Dhamma itself, the 'sacca-dhamma'. And 'sacca-dhamma', that which enables one to become Buddha, still exists. It hasn't fled anywhere! It gives rise to two Buddhas: one in body and the other in mind.

"The real Dhamma," the Buddha told Ananda, "can only be realized through practice" Whoever sees Dhamma, sees the Buddha. Whoever sees the Buddha, sees the Dhamma. And how is this? Previously no Buddha existed; it was only when Siddattha Gotama* realized the Dhamma that he became the Buddha. If we explain it in this way, then he is the same as us. If we realize the Dhamma, then we will likewise be the Buddha. This is called the Buddha in mind or 'nama-dhamma'.

We must be mindful of everything we do, for we become the inheritors of our own good or evil actions. In doing good, we reap good. In doing evil, we reap evil. All you have to do is look into your everyday lives to know that this is so. Siddhatta Gotama was

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* Siddhattha Gotama: the original name of the historical Buddha. (Buddha, the 'one-who-knows', also represents the state of enlightenment or awakening.)

enlightened to the realization of this Truth, and this gave rise to the appearance of a Buddha in the world. Likewise, if each and every person practises to attain to this Truth, then they, too, will change to be a Buddha.

Thus, the Buddha still exists. On hearing this some people would be very happy saying, "If the Buddha still exists, then I can practise Dhamma!" That is how you should see it.

The Dhamma that the Buddha realized is the Dhamma that exists permanently in the world. It can be compared to ground water which permanently exists in the ground. When a person wishes to dig a well, they must dig down deep enough to reach the ground water. The ground water is already there. They do not create the water; they just discover it. Similarly, the Buddha did not invent the Dhamma, did not decree the Dhamma. He merely revealed what was already there. Through contemplation, the Buddha saw the Dhamma. Therefore, it is said that the Buddha was enlightened, for enlightenment is knowing the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the truth of this world. Seeing this, Siddhattha Gotama is called 'The Buddha'. And the Dhamma is that which allows other people to become a Buddha, 'One-who-knows'; one who knows Dhamma. If beings have good conduct and are devoted to the Buddha-Dhamma, then those beings will never be short of virtue and goodness. With understanding, we will see that we are really not far from the Buddha, but sitting face to face with him. When we understand the Dhamma, then at that moment we will see the Buddha.

If one really practises, one will hear the Buddha-Dhamma whether sitting at the root of a tree, lying down or in whatever posture. This is not something merely to think about. It arises from the pure mind. Just remembering these words is not enough, because this depends

upon seeing the Dhamma itself, nothing other than this. Thus we must be determined to practise to be able to see this, and then our practice will really be complete. Wherever we sit, stand, walk or lie down, we will hear the Buddha's Dhamma.

In order to practise his teaching, the Buddha taught us to live in a quiet place so that we can learn to collect and restrain the senses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. This is the foundation for our practice since these are the places where all things arise, and they arise only in these places. Thus we collect and restrain these six senses in order to know the conditions that arise there. All good and evil arise through these six senses. They are the predominant faculties in the body. The eye is predominant in seeing, the ear in hearing, the nose in smelling, the tongue in tasting, the body in contacting hot, cold, hard and soft, and the mind in the arising of mental impressions. All that remains for us to do is to build our practice around these points.

This practice is easy because all that is necessary has already been set down by the Buddha. This is comparable to the Buddha planting an orchard and inviting us to partake of its fruit. We, ourselves, do not need to plant one.

Whether concerning virtue, meditation or wisdom, there is no need to create, decree or speculate, because all that we need to do is follow the things that already exist in the Buddha's teaching.

Therefore, we are beings who have much merit and good fortune in having heard the teachings of the Buddha. The orchard already exists; the fruit is already ripe. Everything is already complete and perfect. All that is lacking is someone to pick the fruit and eat it, someone with faith enough to practise!

We should consider that our merit and good fortune are very valuable. All we need to do is look around to see how much other creatures are possessed of ill-fortune; take dogs, pigs, snakes and other creatures for instance. They have no chance to study Dhamma, no chance to know Dhamma, no chance to practise Dhamma. These are beings possessed of ill-fortune who are receiving *karmic* retribution. When one has no chance to study, to know, to practise Dhamma, then one has no chance to be free from suffering.

As human beings we should not allow ourselves to become victims of ill-fortune, deprived of proper manners and discipline. Do not become a victim of ill-fortune! That is to say; one without hope of attaining the path of freedom to Nibbana, without hope of developing virtue. Do not think that we are already without hope! By thinking in that way, we will then become possessed of ill-fortune the same as those other creatures.

We are beings who have come within the sphere of influence of the Buddha. Thus we human beings are already of sufficient merit and resources. If we correct and develop our understanding, opinions and knowledge in the present, then it will lead us to behave and practise in such a way as to see and know Dhamma in this present life as human beings.

We are thus different from other creatures. We are beings that are capable and have the opportunities to be enlightened to the Dhamma. The Buddha taught that at this present moment, the Dhamma exists here in front of us. The Buddha sits facing us right here and now! At what other time or place are you going to look?

If we don't think rightly, if we don't practise rightly, we will fall

back to being animals, creatures in hell, hungry ghosts or demons.* How is this? Just look in your mind. When anger arises, what is it? There it is, just look! When delusion arises, what is it? That's it, right there! When greed arises, what is it? Look at it right there!

By not recognizing and clearly understanding these mental states, the mind changes from being that of a human being. All conditions are in the state of 'becoming'. Becoming gives rise to 'birth' or existence as determined by the present conditions. Thus we become and exist as our minds condition us.

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* According to Buddhist thought beings are born in any of six states of existence depending on their kamma. These include the Heavenly States (where happiness is predominant), the Human State, and the four above-mentioned Lower States (where suffering is predominant). The Venerable Ajahn always stresses that we should see these states in our own minds in the present moment. So that depending on the condition of the mind, we can say that we are continually being born in these different states. For instance, when the mind is on fire with anger then we have fallen from the Human State and have been born in Hell right here and now.

THE TWO FACES OF REALITY*

In our lives we have two possibilities: indulging in the world or going beyond the world. The Buddha was someone who was able to free himself from the world and thus he realized spiritual liberation.

In the same way, there are two types of knowledge — knowledge of the worldly realm and knowledge of the spiritual, or true wisdom. If we have not yet practised and trained ourselves, no matter how much knowledge we have, it is still worldly and thus cannot liberate us.

Think and look closely! The Buddha said that things of the world spin the world around. Following the world, the mind is entangled in the world, it defiles itself whether coming or going, never remaining content. Worldly people are those who are always looking for something — who can never find enough. Worldly knowledge is really ignorance; it isn't knowledge with clear understanding, therefore there is never an end to it. It revolves around the worldly goals of accumulating things, gaining status, seeking praise and pleasure; it's a mass of delusion which has us stuck fast.

Once we get something, there is jealousy, worry and selfishness. And when we feel threatened and can't ward it off physically, we use our minds to invent all sorts of devices, right up to weapons and even nuclear bombs, only to blow each other up. Why all this trouble and difficulty?

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* A Discourse delivered to the assembly of monks after the recitation of the *Patimokkha*, the monks' disciplinary code, at Wat Pah Pong during the Rains Retreat 1976)

This is the way of the world. The Buddha said that if one follows it around there is no reaching an end.

Come to practise for liberation! It isn't easy to live in accordance with true wisdom, but whoever earnestly seeks the Path and Fruit and aspires to Nibbana will be able to persevere and endure. Endure being contented and satisfied with little; eating little, sleeping little, speaking little and living in moderation. By doing this we can put an end to worldliness.

If the seed of worldliness has not yet been uprooted, then we are continually troubled and confused in a never-ending cycle. Even when you come to ordain, it continues to pull you away. It creates your views, your opinions, it colors and embellishes all your thoughts — that's the way it is.

People don't realize. They say that they will get things done in the world. It's always their hope to complete everything. Just like a new government minister who is eager to get started with his new administration. He thinks that he has all the answers, so he carts away everything of the old administration saying, "Look out! I'll do it all myself." That's all they do, cart things in and cart things out, never getting anything done. They try, but never reach any real completion.

You can never do something which will please everyone — one person likes a little, another likes a lot; one likes short and one likes long; some like salty and some like spicy. To get everyone together and in agreement just cannot be done.

All of us want to accomplish something in our lives but the world, with all of its complexities, makes it almost impossible to bring about any real completion. Even the Buddha, born with all the opportunities of a noble prince, found no completion in the worldly life.

The Trap of the Senses

The Buddha talked about desire and the six things by which desire is gratified: sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch and mind-objects. Desire and lust for happiness, for suffering, for good, for evil and so on, pervades everything!

Sights … there isn't any sight that's quite the same as that of a woman. Isn't that so? Doesn't a really attractive woman make you want to look? One with a really attractive figure comes walking along, 'sak, sek, sak, sek, sak, sek — you can't help but stare! How about sounds? There's no sound that grips you more than that of a woman. It pierces your heart! Smell is the same; a woman's fragrance is the most alluring of all. There's no other smell that's quite the same. Taste — even the taste of the most delicious food cannot compare with that of a woman. Touch is similar; when you caress a woman you are stunned, intoxicated and sent spinning all around!

There was once a famous master of magical spells from Taxila in ancient India. He taught his disciple all his knowledge of charms and incantations. When the disciple was well-versed and ready to fare on his own, he left with this final instruction from his teacher, "I have taught you all that I know of spells, incantations and protective verses. Creatures with sharp teeth, antlers or horns, and even big tusks, you have no need to fear. You will be guarded from all of these, I can guarantee that. However, there is only one thing that I cannot ensure protection against, and that is the charms of a woman. I cannot help you here. There's no spell for protection against this one, you'll have to look after yourself."

The sexes of man and woman — women cause problems for men, men cause problems for women. That's the way it is; they are

opposites. If men live together with men, then there's no trouble. If women live together with women, then there's no trouble. When a man sees a woman his heart pounds like a rice pounder, 'deung, dung, deung, dung, deung, dung'. When a woman sees a man, her heart pounds like a rice pounder, 'deung, dung, deung, dung, deung, dung.' What is this? What are these forces? They pull and suck you in — no one realizes that there's a price to pay.

Mental objects arise in the mind. They are born out of desire: desire for valuable possessions, desire to be rich and just restless seeking after things in general. This type of greed isn't all that deep or strong, it isn't enough to make you faint or lose control. However, when sexual desire arises, you're thrown off balance and lose your control. You would even forget those who raised and brought you up — your own parents!

The Buddha taught that the objects of our senses are a trap — a trap of *Mara**. Mara should be understood as something which harms us. The trap is something which binds us, the same as a snare. It's a trap of Mara's, a hunter's snare, and the hunter is Mara.

If animals are caught in the hunter's trap, it's a sorrowful predicament. They are caught fast and held waiting for the owner of the trap. Have you ever snared birds? The snare springs and 'boop' — caught by the neck! A good strong string now holds it fast. Wherever the bird flies, it cannot escape. It flies here and flies there, but it's held tight waiting for the owner of the snare. When the hunter comes along, that's it — the bird is struck with fear, there's no escape!

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* Mara: the Buddhist 'Tempter' figure. He is either regarded as the deity ruling over the highest heaven of the sensual sphere or as the personification of evil and passions, of the totality of worldly existence and of death. He is the opponent of liberation and he tried in vain to obstruct the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment.

The trap of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects is the same. They catch us and bind us fast. If you attach to the senses, you're the same as a fish caught on a hook. When the fisherman comes, struggle all you want, but you can't get loose. Actually, you're not caught like a fish, it's more like a frog — a frog gulps down the whole hook right to its guts, a fish just gets it caught in its mouth.

Anyone attached to the senses is the same. Like a drunk whose liver is not yet destroyed — he doesn't know when he has had enough. He continues to indulge and drink carelessly. He's caught and later suffers illness and pain.

A man comes walking along a road. He is very thirsty from his journey and is craving for a drink of water. He stops at a place beside the road and asks for a drink. The owner of the water says, "You can drink this water if you like; the colour is good, the smell is good, the taste is good, but if you drink it you will become ill. I must tell you this beforehand, it'll make you sick enough to die or nearly die." The thirsty man does not listen. He's as thirsty as a person after an operation who has been denied water for seven days — he's crying for water!

It's the same with a person thirsting after the senses. The Buddha taught that they are poisonous — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects are poison. They are a dangerous trap. But this man is thirsty and doesn't listen; because of his thirst he is in tears, crying, "Give me water, no matter how painful the consequences, let me drink!" So he tips out a bit and swallows it down finding it very tasty. He drinks his fill and gets so sick that he almost dies. He didn't listen because of his overpowering desire.

That is how it is for a person caught in the pleasures of the senses. He drinks in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects —

they are all very delicious! So he drinks without stopping and there he remains, stuck fast until the day he dies.

The Worldly Way and Liberation

Some people die, some people almost die — that's how it is to be stuck in the way of the world. Worldly wisdom seeks after the senses and their objects. However wise it is, it's only wise in a worldly sense. No matter how appealing it is, it's only appealing in a worldly sense. It isn't the happiness of liberation; it won't free you from the world.

We have come to practise as monks in order to penetrate true wisdom, to rid ourselves of attachment. Practise to be free of attachment! Investigate the body, investigate everything around you until you become weary and disenchanted with it all and then dispassion will set in. Dispassion will not arise easily however, because you still don't see clearly.

We come and ordain — we study, we read, we practise, we meditate. We determine to make our minds resolute but it's hard to do. We resolve to do a certain practice, we say that we'll practise in this way — only a day or two goes by, maybe just a few hours pass and we forget all about it. Then we remember and try to make our minds firm again, thinking, "This time I'll do it right!" Shortly after that we are pulled away by one of our senses and it all falls apart again, so we have to start all over again! This is how it is.

Like a poorly built dam, our practice is weak. We are still unable to see and follow true practice. And it goes on like this until we arrive at true wisdom. Once we penetrate to the Truth, we are freed from everything. Only peace remains.

Our minds aren't peaceful because of all our old habits. We inherit these because of our past actions and thus they follow us around and constantly plague us. We struggle and search for a way out, but we're bound by them and they pull us back. These habits don't forget their old haunts. They grab onto all the old familiar things to use, to admire and to consume — that's how we live.

It's the same with everything. No matter how hard you try to free yourself, until you see the value of freedom and the pain in bondage, you won't be able to let go. You usually just practise enduring the hardships, keeping the discipline, following the form blindly and not in order to attain freedom or liberation. You must see the value in letting go of your desires before you can really practise; only then is true practice possible.

Everything that you do must be done with clarity and awareness. When you see clearly, there will no longer be any need for enduring or forcing yourself. You have difficulties and are burdened because you miss this point. Peace comes from doing things completely with your whole body and mind. Whatever is left undone leaves you with a feeling of discontent. These things bind you with worry wherever you go. You want to complete everything, but it's impossible to get it all done.

Take the case of the merchants who regularly come here to see me. They say, "Oh, when my debts are all paid and property in order, I'll come to ordain." They talk like that but will they ever finish and get it all in order? There's no end to it. They pay up their debts with another loan, they pay off that one and do it all again. A merchant thinks that if he frees himself from debt he will be happy, but there's no end to paying things off. That's the way worldliness fools us — we

go around and around like this never realizing our predicament.

Constant Practice

In our practice we just look directly at the mind. Whenever our practice begins to slacken off, we see it and make it firm — then shortly after, it goes again. That's the way that it pulls us around. But people with good mindfulness take a firm hold and constantly re-establish themselves, pulling themselves back, training, practising and developing themselves in this way.

The person with poor mindfulness just lets it all fall apart, they stray off and get side-tracked again and again. They're not strong and firmly rooted in practice. Thus they're continuously pulled away by their worldly desires — something pulls them here, something else pulls them there. They live following their whims and desires, never putting an end to this worldly cycle.

Coming to ordain is not so easy. You must determine to make your mind firm. You should be confident in the practice, confident enough to continue practising until you become fed up with both your likes and dislikes and then see in accordance with truth. Usually, you are dissatisfied with only your dislikes, if you like something then you aren't ready to give it up. You have to become fed up with both your dislikes and your likes, your suffering and your happiness.

You don't see that this is the very essence of the Dhamma! The Dhamma of the Buddha is profound and refined. It isn't easy to comprehend. If true wisdom has not yet arisen, then you can't see it. You don't look forward and you don't look back. When you experience happiness, you think that there will only be happiness. Whenever there is suffering, you think that there will only be suffering. You don't see

that wherever there is big, there is small; wherever there is small, there is big. You don't see it that way. You see only one side and thus it's never-ending.

There are two sides to everything; you must see both sides. Then, when happiness arises, you don't get lost; when suffering arises, you don't get lost. When happiness arises, you don't forget the suffering because you see that they are interdependent.

In a similar way, food is beneficial to all beings for the maintenance of the body. But actually, food can also be harmful, for example when it causes various stomach upsets. When you see the advantages of something, you must perceive the disadvantages also and vice versa. When you feel hatred and aversion, you should contemplate love and understanding. In this way, you become more balanced and your mind becomes more settled.

The Empty Flag

I once read a book about Zen. In Zen, you know, they don't teach with a lot of explanation. For instance, if a monk is falling asleep during meditation, they come with a stick and 'whack!' they give him a hit on the back. When the erring student is hit, he shows his gratitude by thanking the attendant. In Zen practice one is taught to be thankful for all the feelings which give one the opportunity to develop.

One day there was an assembly of monks gathered for a meeting. Outside the hall a flag was blowing in the wind. There arose a dispute between two monks as to how the flag was actually blowing in the wind. One of the monks claimed that it was because of the wind while the other argued that it was because of the flag. Thus they quarrelled because of their narrow views and couldn't come to any kind of

agreement. They would have argued like this until the day they died. However, their teacher intervened and said, "Neither one of you is right. The correct understanding is that there is no flag and there is no wind."

This is the practice: not to have anything, not to have the flag and not to have the wind. If there is a flag, then there is a wind; if there is a wind, then there is a flag. You should contemplate and reflect on this thoroughly until you see in accordance with truth. If considered well, then there will remain nothing. It's empty — void; empty of the flag and empty of the wind. In the great Emptiness there is no flag and there is no wind. There is no birth, no old age, no sickness or death. Our conventional understanding of flag and wind is only a concept. In reality there is nothing. That's all! There is nothing more than empty labels.

If we practise in this way, we will come to see completeness and all of our problems will come to an end. In the great Emptiness the King of Death will never find you. There is nothing for old age, sickness and death to follow. When we see and understand in accordance with truth, that is, with Right Understanding, then there is only this great Emptiness. It's here that there is no more 'we', no 'they', no 'self' at all.

The Forest of the Senses

The world with its never-ending ways goes on and on. If we try to understand it all, it leads us only to chaos and confusion. However, if we contemplate the world clearly, then true wisdom will arise. The Buddha himself was one who was well-versed in the ways of the world. He had great ability to influence and lead because of his abundance of

worldly knowledge. Through the transformation of his worldly, mundane wisdom, he penetrated and attained to supramundane wisdom, making him a truly superior being. So, if we work with this teaching, turning it inwards for contemplation, we will attain to an understanding on an entirely new level. When we see an object, there is no object. When we hear a sound, there is no sound. In smelling, we can say that there is no smell. All of the senses are manifest, but they are empty of anything stable. They are just sensations that arise and then pass away.

If we understand according to this reality, then the senses cease to be substantial. They are just sensations which come and go. In truth there isn't any 'thing'. If there isn't any 'thing', then there is no 'we' and no 'they'. If there is no 'we' as a person, then there is nothing belonging to 'us'. It's in this way that suffering is extinguished. There isn't anybody to acquire suffering, so who is it who suffers?

When suffering arises, we attach to the suffering and thereby must *really* suffer. In the same way, when happiness arises, we attach to the happiness and consequently experience pleasure. Attachment to these feelings gives rise to the concept of 'self' or 'ego' and thoughts of 'we' and 'they' continually manifest. Here is where it all begins and then carries us around in its never-ending cycle.

So, we practise meditation and live according to the Dhamma. We leave our homes to come and live in the forest and absorb the peace of mind it gives us. We have fled in order to contend with ourselves and not through fear or escapism. But people who come and live in the forest become attached to living in it; just as people who live in the city become attached to the city. They lose their way in the forest and they lose their way in the city.

The Buddha praised living in the forest because the physical

and mental solitude that it gives us is conducive to the practice for liberation. However, he didn't want us to become dependent upon living in the forest or get stuck in its peace and tranquillity. We come to practise in order for wisdom to arise. Here in the forest we can sow and cultivate the seeds of wisdom. Living amongst chaos and turmoil these seeds have difficulty in growing, but once we have learned to live in the forest, we can return and contend with the city and all the stimulation of the senses that it brings us. Learning to live in the forest means to allow wisdom to grow and develop. We can then apply this wisdom no matter where we go.

When our senses are stimulated, we become agitated and the senses become our antagonists. They antagonize us because we are still foolish and don't have the wisdom to deal with them. In reality they are our teachers but, because of our ignorance, we don't see it that way. When we lived in the city we never thought that our senses could teach us anything. As long as true wisdom has not yet manifested, we continue to see the senses and their objects as enemies. Once true wisdom arises, they are no longer our enemies but become the doorway to insight and clear understanding.

A good example is the wild chickens here in the forest. We all know how much they are afraid of humans. However, since I have lived here in the forest I have been able to teach them and to learn from them as well. At one time I began throwing out rice for them to eat. At first they were very frightened and wouldn't go near the rice. However, after a long time they got used to it and even began to expect it. You see, there is something to be learned here — they originally thought that there was danger in the rice, that the rice was an enemy. In truth there was no danger in the rice, but they didn't know that the

rice was food and so were afraid. When they finally saw for themselves that there was nothing to fear, they could come and eat without any danger.

The chickens learn naturally in this way. Living here in the forest we learn in a similar way. Formerly we thought that our senses were a problem and because of our ignorance in the proper use of them, they caused us a lot of trouble. However, by experience in practice we learn to see them in accordance with truth. We learn to make use of them just as the chickens could use the rice. Then they are no longer opposed to us and problems disappear.

As long as we think, investigate and understand wrongly, these things will oppose us. But as soon as we begin to investigate properly, that which we experience will bring us to wisdom and clear understanding, just as the chickens came to their understanding. In this way, we can say that they practised '*vipassana*' *. They know in accordance with truth, it's their insight.

In our practice we have our senses as tools which, when rightly used, enable us to become enlightened to the Dhamma. This is something which all meditators should contemplate. When we don't see this clearly, we remain in perpetual conflict.

So, as we live in the quietude of the forest, we continue to develop subtle feelings and prepare the ground for cultivating wisdom. Don't think that when you have gained some peace of mind living here in the quiet forest that that's enough. Don't settle for just that! Remember that we have come to cultivate and grow the seeds of wisdom.

As wisdom matures and we begin to understand in accordance with the Truth, we will no longer be dragged up and down. Usually, if

* see glossary

we have a pleasant mood, we behave in one way; and if we have an unpleasant mood, we are another way. We like something and we are up; we dislike something and we are down. In this way we are still in conflict with enemies. When these things no longer oppose us, they become stabilized and balance out. There are no longer ups and downs or highs and lows. We understand these things of the world and know that that's just the way it is. It's just 'worldly dhamma'.

'Worldly dhamma'* changes to become the 'Path'**. Worldly dhamma has eight ways; the Path has eight ways. Wherever worldly dhamma exists, the Path is to be found also. When we live with clarity, all of our worldly experience becomes the practising of the Eightfold Path. Without clarity, worldly dhamma predominates and we are turned away from the Path. When Right Understanding arises, liberation from suffering lies right here before us. You will not find liberation by running around looking elsewhere.

So don't be in a hurry and try to push or rush your practice. Do your meditation gently and gradually step by step. In regard to peacefulness, if you become peaceful, then accept it; if you don't become peaceful, then accept that also. That's the nature of the mind. We must find our own practice and persistently keep at it.

Perhaps wisdom does not arise. I used to think about my practice that, when there was no wisdom, I could force myself to have it. But it didn't work; things remained the same. Then, after careful

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* Worldly dhamma: the eight worldly conditions are: gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and suffering, praise and blame.

** Path: (the Eightfold Path) comprises 8 factors of spiritual practice leading to the extinction of suffering: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

consideration, I saw that to contemplate things that we don't have cannot be done. So what's the best thing to do? It's better just to practise with equanimity. If there is nothing to cause us concern, then there's nothing to remedy. If there's no problem then we don't have to try to solve it. When there is a problem that's when you must solve it, right there! There's no need to go search for anything special, just live normally. But know where your mind is. Live mindfully and clearly comprehending. Let wisdom be your guide; don't live indulging in your moods. Be heedful and alert. If there is nothing, that's fine; when something arises, then investigate and contemplate it.

Coming to the Center

Try watching a spider. A spider spins its web in any convenient niche and then sits in the center, staying still and silent. Later, a fly comes along and lands on the web. As soon as it touches and shakes the web, 'boop!' — the spider pounces and winds it up in thread. It stores the insect away and then returns again to collect itself silently in the center of the web.

Watching a spider like this can give rise to wisdom. Our six senses have mind at the center surrounded by eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. When one of the senses is stimulated, for instance, form contacting the eye, it shakes and reaches the mind. The mind is that which knows, that which knows form. Just this much is enough for wisdom to arise. It's that simple.

Like a spider in its web, we should live keeping to ourselves. As soon as the spider feels an insect contact the web, it quickly grabs it, ties it up and once again returns to the center. This is not at all different from our own minds. 'Coming to the center' means living

mindfully with clear comprehension, being always alert and doing everything with exactness and precision — this is our center. There's really not a lot for us to do; we just carefully live in this way. But that doesn't mean that we live heedlessly thinking, "There is no need to do sitting or walking meditation!" and so forget all about our practice. We can't be careless. We must remain alert just as the spider waits to snatch up insects for its food.

This is all that we have to know — sitting and contemplating that spider. Just this much, and wisdom can arise spontaneously. Our mind is comparable to the spider; our moods and mental impressions are comparable to the various insects. That's all there is to it. The senses envelop and constantly stimulate the mind; when any of them contact something, it immediately reaches the mind. The mind then investigates and examines it thoroughly, after which it returns to the center. This is how we abide — alert, acting with precision and always mindfully comprehending with wisdom. Just this much, and our practice is complete.

This point is very important! It isn't that we have to do sitting practice throughout the day and night, or that we have to do walking meditation all day and all night. If this is our view of practice, then we really make it difficult for ourselves. We should do what we can according to our strength and energy, using our physical capabilities in the proper amount.

It's very important to know the mind and the other senses well. Know how they come and go, how they arise and how they pass away. Understand this thoroughly! In the language of Dhamma we can also say that, just as the spider traps the various insects, the mind binds up the senses with anicca-dukkha-anatta. Where can they go? We keep

them for food. These things are stored away as our nourishment.* That's enough; there's no more to do, just this much. This is the nourishment for our minds, nourishment for one who is aware and who has understanding.

If you know that these things are impermanent, bound up with suffering and that none of it is you, then you would be crazy to go after them! If you don't see clearly in this way, then you must suffer. When you take a good look and see these things as really impermanent, even though they may seem worth going after, really they are not. Why do you want them when their nature is pain and suffering? It's not ours, there is no self, there is nothing belonging to us. So why are you seeking after them? All problems are ended right here. Where else will you end them?

Just take a good look at the spider and turn it inwards, turn it back onto yourself. You will see that it's all the same. When the mind has seen anicca-dukkha-anatta, it lets go and releases itself. It no longer attaches to suffering or to happiness. This is the nourishment for the mind of one who practises and really trains. That's all; it's that simple. You don't have to go searching anywhere. So no matter what you are doing, you are there, no need for a lot of fuss and bother. In this way the momentum and energy of your practice will continuously grow and mature.

Escape

This momentum of practice leads us towards freedom from the cycle of birth and death. We haven't escaped from that cycle because we still insist on craving and desiring. We don't commit unwholesome

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* the nourishment for contemplation, to *feed* wisdom.

or immoral acts, but doing this only means that we are living in accordance with the dhamma of morality. For instance, there is a chant in which people ask that all beings not be separated from the things that they love and are fond of. If you think about it, this is very childish. It's the way of people who still can't let go.

This is the nature of human desire — desire for things to be other than the way that they are; wishing for longevity, hoping that there is no death or sickness. This is how people hope and desire, then when you tell them that whatever desires they have which are not fulfilled cause suffering, it clobbers them right over the head. What can they say? Nothing, because it's the truth! You're pointing right at their desires.

When we talk about desires we know that everyone has them and wants them fulfilled, but nobody is willing to stop, nobody really wants to escape. Therefore our practice must be patiently refined down. Those who practise steadfastly, without deviation or slackness, and have a gentle and restrained manner, always persevering with constancy, those are the ones who will know. No matter what arises, they will remain firm and unshakable.

THE TRAINING OF THE HEART*

In the time of Ajahn Mun** and Ajahn Sao*** life was a lot simpler, a lot less complicated than it is today. In those days monks had few duties and ceremonies to perform. They lived in forests without permanent resting places. There they could devote themselves entirely to the practice of meditation.

In those times one rarely encountered the luxuries that are so commonplace today, there simply weren't any. One had to make drinking cups and spittoons out of bamboo and laypeople seldom came to visit. One didn't want or expect much and was content with what one had. One could live and breath meditation!

The monks suffered many privations living like this. If someone caught malaria and went to ask for medicine, the teacher would say, "You don't need medicine! Keep practising." Besides, there simply weren't all the drugs that are available now. All one had were the herbs and roots that grew in the forest. The environment was such that monks had to have a great deal of patience and endurance; they didn't bother over minor ailments. Nowadays you get a bit of an ache and

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* A talk given to a group of Western Monks from Wat Bovornives, Bangkok, March 1977. In this translation 'heart' is used where 'mind' was used in other translations.

** Ajahn Mun: probably the most respected and most influential meditation master of this century in Thailand. Under his guidance the ascetic forest tradition (*Dhutanga Kammatthana*) became a very important influence in the revival of Buddhist meditation practice. The vast majority of recently deceased and presently living great meditation masters of Thailand are either direct disciples of the Venerable Ajahn or were substantially influenced by his Teachings. Ajahn Mun passed away in November 1949.

*** Ajahn Sao: Ajahn Mun's teacher

you're off to the hospital!

Sometimes one had to walk ten to twelve kilometers on almsround. You would leave as soon as it was light and maybe return around ten or eleven o'clock. One didn't get very much either, perhaps some glutinous rice, salt or a few chilis. Whether you got anything to eat with the rice or not didn't matter. That's the way it was. No one dared complain of hunger or fatigue; they were just not inclined to complain but learned to take care of themselves. They practised in the forest with patience and endurance alongside the many dangers that lurked in the surroundings. There were many wild and fierce animals living in the jungles and there were many hardships for body and mind in the ascetic practice of the *Dhutanga* or Forest-Dwelling monk. Indeed, the patience and endurance of the monks in those days was excellent because the circumstances compelled it to be so.

In the present day, circumstances compel us in the opposite direction. In ancient times, one had to travel by foot; then came the oxcart and then the automobile. Aspiration and ambition increased, so that now, if the car is not air-conditioned, you won't even sit in it; impossible to go if there is no air-conditioning! The virtues of patience and endurance are becoming weaker and weaker. The standards for meditation and practice are lax and getting laxer, until we find that meditators these days like to follow their own opinions and desires. When the old folks talk about the old days, it's like listening to a myth or a legend. You just listen indifferently, but you don't understand. It just doesn't reach you.

As far as we should be concerned about the ancient monastic tradition, a monk should spend at least five years with his teacher. Some days you should avoid speaking to anyone. Don't allow yourself

to speak or talk very much. Don't read books. Read your own heart instead. Take Wat Pah Pong for example. These days many university graduates are coming to ordain. I try to stop them from spending their time reading books about Dhamma, because these people are always reading books. They have so many opportunities for reading books, but opportunities for reading their own hearts are rare. So, when they come to ordain for three months following the Thai custom, I try to get them to close their books and manuals. While they are ordained they have this splendid opportunity to read their own hearts.

Listening to your own heart is really very interesting. This untrained heart races around following its own untrained habits. It jumps about excitedly, randomly, because it has never been trained. So train your heart! Buddhist meditation is about the heart; to develop the heart or mind, to develop your own heart. This is very, very important. This training of the heart is the main emphasis. Buddhism is the religion of the heart. Only this. One who practises to develop the heart is one who practises Buddhism.

This heart of ours lives in a cage, and what's more, there's a raging tiger in that cage. If this maverick heart of ours doesn't get what it wants, it makes trouble. You must discipline it with meditation, with samadhi. This is called "Training the Heart". At the very beginning, the foundation of practice is the establishment of moral discipline (*Sila**). Sila is the training of the body and speech. From this arises conflict and confusion. When you don't let yourself do what you want to do, there is conflict.

Eat little. Sleep little. Speak little. Whatever it may be of worldly habits, lessen them, go against their power. Don't just do as you like,

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* see glossary

don't indulge in your thoughts. Stop this slavish adherence. You must constantly go against the stream of ignorance. This is called 'discipline'. When you discipline your heart, it becomes very dissatisfied and begins to struggle. It becomes restricted and oppressed. When the heart is prevented from doing what it wants to do, it starts wandering and struggling. Suffering becomes apparent to us.

This suffering is the first of the Four Noble Truths. Most people want to get away from it. They don't want to have any kind of suffering at all. Actually, this suffering is what brings us wisdom; it makes us contemplate dukkha. Happiness (sukha) tends to make us close our eyes and ears. It never allows us to develop patience. Comfort and happiness make us careless. Of these two defilements, dukkha is the easiest to see. Therefore we must bring up suffering in order to put an end to our suffering. We must first know what dukkha is before we can know how to practise meditation.

In the beginning you have to train your heart like this. You may not understand what is happening or what the point of it is, but when the teacher tells you to do something, then you must do it. You will develop the virtues of patience and endurance. Whatever happens, you endure, because that is the way it is. For example, when you begin to practise samadhi you want peace and tranquillity. But you don't get any. You don't get any because you have never practised this way. Your heart says, "I'll sit until I attain tranquillity." But when tranquillity doesn't arise, you suffer. And when there is suffering, you get up and run away! To practise like this can not be called 'developing the heart.' It's called 'desertion.'

Instead of indulging in your moods, you train yourself with the Dhamma of the Buddha. Lazy or diligent, you just keep on practising.

Don't you think that this is a better way? The other way, the way of following your moods, will never reach the Dhamma. If you practise the Dhamma, then whatever the mood may be, you keep on practising, constantly practising. The other way of self-indulgence is not the way of the Buddha. When we follow our own views on practice, our own opinions about the Dhamma, we can never see clearly what is right and what is wrong. We don't know our own heart. We don't know ourselves.

Therefore, to practise following your own teachings is the slowest way. To practise following the Dhamma is the direct way. Lazy you practise; diligent you practise. You are aware of time and place. This is called 'developing the heart.'

If you indulge in following your own views and try to practise accordingly, then you will start thinking and doubting a lot. You think to yourself, "I don't have very much merit. I don't have any luck. I've been practising meditation for years now and I'm still unenlightened. I still haven't seen the Dhamma." To practise with this kind of attitude can not be called 'developing the heart.' It is called 'developing disaster.'

If, at this time, you are like this, if you are a meditator who still doesn't know, who doesn't see, if you haven't renewed yourself yet, it's because you've been practising wrongly. You haven't been following the Teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha taught like this: "Ananda, practise a lot! Develop your practice constantly. Then all your doubts, all your uncertainties, will vanish." These doubts will never vanish through thinking, nor through theorizing, nor through speculation, nor through discussion. Nor will doubts disappear by not doing anything. All defilements will vanish through developing the

heart, through right practice only.

The way of developing the heart as taught by the Buddha is the exact opposite of the way of the world, because his teachings come from a pure heart. A pure heart, unattached to defilements, is the way of the Buddha and his disciples.

If you practise the Dhamma, you must bow your heart to the Dhamma. You must not make the Dhamma bow to you. When you practise this way, suffering arises. There isn't a single person who can escape this suffering. So when you commence your practice suffering is right there.

The duties of meditators are mindfulness, collectedness and contentment. These things stop us. They stop the habits of the hearts of those who have never trained. And why should we bother to do this? If you don't bother to train your heart, then it remains wild, following the ways of nature. It's possible to train that nature so that it can be used to advantage. You can compare it with trees. If we just left trees in their natural state, then we would never be able to build a house with them. We couldn't make planks or anything of use in building a house. However, if a carpenter came along wanting to build a house, he would go looking for trees such as these. He would take this raw material and use it to advantage. In a short time he could have a house built.

Meditation and developing the heart are similar to this. You must take this untrained heart, the same as you would take a tree in its natural state in the forest, and train this natural heart so that it is more refined, so that it's more aware of itself and is more sensitive. Everything is in its natural state. When we understand nature, then we can change it, we can detach from it, we can let go of it. Then we

won't suffer any more.

The nature of our heart is such that whenever it clings and grasps there is agitation and confusion. First it might wander over there, then it might wander over here. When we come to observe this agitation, we might think that it's impossible to train the heart and so we suffer accordingly. We don't understand that this is the way the heart is. There will be thoughts and feelings moving about like this even though we are practising, trying to attain peace. That's the way it is.

When we have contemplated many times the nature of the heart, then we will come to understand that this heart is just as it is and can't be otherwise. We will know that the heart's ways are just as they are. That's its nature. If we see this clearly, then we can detach from thoughts and feelings. And we don't have to add on anything more by constantly having to tell ourselves that 'that's just the way it is.' When the heart truly understands, it lets go of everything. Thinking and feeling will still be there, but that very thinking and feeling will be deprived of power.

This is similar to a child who likes to play and frolic in ways that annoy us, to the extent that we scold or spank them. We should understand that it's natural for a child to act that way. Then we could let go and leave them to play in their own way. So our troubles are over. How are they over? Because we accept the ways of children. Our outlook changes and we accept the true nature of things. We let go and our heart becomes more peaceful. We have Right Understanding.

If we have wrong understanding, then even living in a deep, dark cave would be chaos, or living high up in the mountains would be chaos. The heart can only be at peace when there is Right

Understanding. Then there are no more riddles to solve and no more problems arise.

This is the way it is. You detach. You let go. Whenever there is any feeling of clinging, we detach from it, because we know that that very feeling is just as it is. It didn't come along especially to annoy us. We might think that it did, but in truth it just is that way. If we start to think and consider it further, that, too, is just as it is. If we let go, then form is merely form, sound is merely sound, odour is merely odour, taste is merely taste, touch is merely touch and the heart is merely the heart. It's similar to oil and water. If you put the two together in a bottle, they won't mix because of the difference of their nature.

Oil and water are different in the same way that a wise person and an ignorant person are different. The Buddha lived with form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought. He was an Arahant (Enlightened One), so he turned away from rather than toward these things. He turned away and detached little by little since he understood that the heart is just the heart and thought is just thought. He didn't confuse and mix them together.

The heart is just the heart; thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. Let things be just as they are. Let form be just form, let sound be just sound, let thought be just thought. Why should we bother to attach to them? If we think and feel in this way, then there is detachment and separateness. Our thoughts and feelings will be on one side and our heart will be on the other. Just like oil and water — they are in the same bottle but they are separate.

The Buddha and his enlightened disciples lived with ordinary, unenlightened people. They not only lived with these people, but they

taught these ordinary, unenlightened, unaware ones how to be noble, enlightened, wise ones. They could do this because they knew how to practise. They knew that it's a matter of the heart, just as I have explained.

So, as far as your practice of meditation goes, don't bother to doubt it. If we run away from home to ordain, it's not running away to get lost in delusion. Nor is it out of cowardice or fear. It's running away in order to train ourselves, in order to master ourselves. If we have understanding like this, then we can follow the Dhamma. The Dhamma will become clearer and clearer. The one who understands the Dhamma, understands themselves; and the one who understands themselves, understands the Dhamma. Nowadays, only the sterile remains of the Dhamma have become the accepted order. In reality, the true Dhamma is everywhere. There is no need to escape to somewhere else. Instead escape through wisdom. Escape through intelligence. Escape through skill. Don't escape through ignorance. If you want peace, then let it be the peace of wisdom. That's enough.

Whenever we see the Dhamma, then there is the right way, the right path. Defilements are just defilements, the heart is just the heart. Whenever we detach and separate so that there are just these things as they really are, then they are merely objects to us. When we are on the right path, then we are impeccable. When we are impeccable, there is openness and freedom all the time.

The Buddha said, "Listen to me, monks. You must not cling to any dhammas.*" What are these dhammas? They are everything; there isn't anything which is not dhamma. Love and hate are dhammas, happiness and suffering are dhammas, like and dislike are dhammas;

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* see glossary

all of these things, no matter how insignificant, are dhammas. When we practise the Dhamma, when we understand, then we can let go. And thus we can comply with the Buddha's teaching of not clinging to any dhammas.

All conditions that are born in our heart, all conditions of our mind, all conditions of our body, are always in a state of change. The Buddha taught not to cling to any of them. He taught his disciples to practise in order to detach from all conditions and not to practise in order to acquire any more.

If we follow the teachings of the Buddha, then we are right. We are right but it is also troublesome. It's not that the teachings are troublesome, but it's our defilements which are troublesome. The defilements wrongly comprehended obstruct us and cause us trouble. There isn't really anything troublesome with following the Buddha's teaching. In fact we can say that clinging to the Path of the Buddha doesn't bring suffering, because the Path is simply to "let go" of every single dhamma.

For the ultimate in the practice of Buddhist meditation, the Buddha taught the practice of 'letting go'. Don't carry anything around. Detach. If you see goodness, let it go. If you see rightness, let it go. These words, 'let go', do not mean that we don't have to practise. It means that we have to practise following the method of 'letting go' itself. The Buddha taught us to contemplate all dhammas, to develop the Path through contemplating our own body and heart. The Dhamma isn't anywhere else. It's right here. Not some place far away. It's right here in this very body and heart of ours.

Therefore a meditator must practise with energy. Make the heart grander and brighter. Make it free and independent. Having done a

good deed, don't carry it around in your heart, let it go. Having refrained from doing an evil deed, let it go. The Buddha taught us to live in the immediacy of the present, in the here and now. Don't lose yourself in the past or the future.

The teaching that people least understand and which conflicts most with their own opinions, is this teaching of 'letting go' or 'working with an empty mind.' This way of talking is called 'Dhamma language.' When we conceive this in worldly terms, we become confused and think that we can do anything we want. It can be interpreted this way, but its real meaning is closer to this: It's as if we are carrying a heavy rock. After a while we begin to feel its weight but we don't know how to let it go. So we endure this heavy burden all the time. If someone tells us to throw it away, we say, "If I throw it away, I won't have anything left." If told of all the benefits to be gained from throwing it away, we wouldn't believe them but would keep thinking, "If I throw it away, I will have nothing." So we keep on carrying this heavy rock until we become so weak and exhausted that we can no longer endure, then we drop it.

Having dropped it, we suddenly experience the benefits of letting go. We immediately feel better and lighter and we know for ourselves how much of a burden carrying a rock can be. Before we let go of the rock, we couldn't possibly know the benefits of letting go. So if someone tells us to let go, an unenlightened person wouldn't see the purpose of it. They would just blindly clutch at the rock and refuse to let go until it became so unbearably heavy that they just had to let go. Then they can feel for themselves the lightness and relief and thus know the benefits of letting go. Later on we may start carrying burdens again, but now we know what the results will be so we can let go more

easily. This understanding, that it's useless to carry burdens around and that letting go brings ease and lightness, is an example of knowing ourselves.

Our pride, our sense of self that we depend on, is the same as that heavy rock. Like that rock, if we think about letting go of self-conceit, we are afraid that without it, there would be nothing left. But when we can finally let it go, we realize for ourselves the ease and comfort of not clinging.

In the training of the heart, you mustn't cling to either praise or blame. To just want praise and not to want blame is the way of the world. The way of the Buddha is to accept praise when it is appropriate and to accept blame when it is appropriate. For example, in raising a child it's very good to just not scold all the time. Some people scold too much. A wise person knows the proper time to scold and the proper time to praise. Our heart is the same. Use intelligence to know the heart. Use skill in taking care of your heart. Then you will be one who is clever in the training of the heart. And when the heart is skilled, it can rid us of our suffering. Suffering exists right here in our hearts. It's always complicating things, creating and making the heart heavy. It's born here. It also dies here.

The way of the heart is like this. Sometimes there are good thoughts, sometimes there are bad thoughts. The heart is deceitful. Don't trust it! Instead look straight at the conditions of the heart itself. Accept them as they are. They're just as they are. Whether it's good or evil or whatever, that's the way it is. If you don't grab hold of these conditions, then they don't become anything more or less than what they already are. If we grab hold we'll get bitten and will then suffer.

With Right Understanding there's only peace. Samadhi is born

and wisdom takes over. Wherever you may sit or lie down, there is peace. There is peace everywhere, no matter where you may go.

So today you have brought your disciples here to listen to the Dhamma. You may understand some of it, some of it you may not. In order for you to understand more easily, I've talked about the practice of meditation. Whether you think it is right or not, you should take and contemplate it.

As a teacher myself, I've been in a similar predicament. I, too, have longed to listen to Dhamma talks because, wherever I went, I was giving talks to others but never had a chance to listen. So, at this time, you really appreciate listening to a talk from a teacher. Time passes by so quickly when you're sitting and listening quietly. You're hungry for Dhamma so you really want to listen. At first, giving talks to others is a pleasure, but after awhile, the pleasure is gone. You feel bored and tired. Then you want to listen. So when you listen to a talk from a teacher, you feel much inspiration and you understand easily. When you are getting old and there's hunger for Dhamma, its flavour is especially delicious.

Being a teacher of others you are an example to them, you're a model for other bhikkhus. You're an example to everybody, so don't forget yourself. But don't think about yourself either. If such thoughts do arise, get rid of them. If you do this then you will be one who knows himself.

There are a million ways to practise Dhamma. There's no end to the things that can be said about meditation. There are so many things that can make us doubt. Just keep sweeping them out, then there's no more doubt! When we have Right Understanding like this, no matter where we sit or walk, there is peace and ease. Wherever we

may meditate, that's the place you bring your awareness. Don't hold that one only meditates while sitting or walking. Everything and everywhere is our practice. There's awareness all the time. There is mindfulness all the time. We can see birth and death of mind and body all the time and we don't let it clutter our hearts. Let it go constantly. If love comes, let it go back to its home. If greed comes, let it go home. If anger comes, let it go home. Follow them. Where do they live? Then escort them there. Don't keep anything. If you practise like this then you are like an empty house. Or, explained another way, this is an empty heart, a heart empty and free of all evil. We call it an 'empty heart' but it isn't empty as if there was nothing, it's empty of evil but filled with wisdom. Then whatever you do, you'll do with wisdom. You'll think with wisdom. You'll eat with wisdom. There will only be wisdom.

This is the teaching for today and I offer it to you. I've recorded it on tape. If listening to Dhamma makes your heart at peace, that's good enough. You don't need to remember anything. Some may not believe this. If we make our heart peaceful and just listen, letting it pass by but contemplating continuously like this, then we're like a tape recorder. After some time when we turn on, everything is there. Have no fear that there won't be anything. As soon as you turn on your tape recorder, everything is there.

I wish to offer this to every bhikkhu and to everyone. Some of you probably know only a little Thai, but that doesn't matter. May you learn the language of the Dhamma. That's good enough!

LIVING WITH THE COBRA*

This short talk is for the benefit of a new disciple who will soon be returning to London. May it serve to help you understand the teaching that you have studied here at Wat Pah Pong. Most simply, this is the practice to be free of suffering in the cycle of birth and death.

In order to do this practice, remember to regard all the various activities of mind, all those you like and all those you dislike, in the same way as you would regard a cobra. The cobra is an extremely poisonous snake, poisonous enough to cause death if it should bite us. And so, also, it is with our moods; the moods that we like are poisonous, the moods that we dislike are also poisonous. They prevent our minds from being free and hinder our understanding of the Truth as it was taught by the Buddha.

Thus it is necessary to try to maintain our mindfulness throughout the day and night. Whatever you may be doing, be it standing, sitting, lying down, speaking or whatever, you should do with mindfulness. When you are able to establish this mindfulness, you'll find that there will arise clear comprehension associated with it, and these two conditions will bring about wisdom. Thus mindfulness, clear comprehension and wisdom will work together, and you'll be like one who is *awake* both day and night.

These teachings left us by the Buddha are not teachings to be

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* A brief talk given as final instruction to an elderly Englishwoman who spent two months under the guidance of Ajahn Chah at the end of 1978 and beginning of 1979.

just listened to, or simply absorbed on an intellectual level. They are teachings that through practice can be made to arise and known in our hearts. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we should have these teachings. And what we mean by 'to have these teachings' or 'to have the Truth', is that, whatever we do or say, we do and say with wisdom. When we think and contemplate, we do so with wisdom. We say that one who has mindfulness and clear comprehension combined in this way with wisdom, is one who is close to the Buddha.

When you leave here, you should practise bringing everything back to your own mind. Look at your mind with this mindfulness and clear comprehension and develop this wisdom. With these three conditions there will arise a 'letting go'. You'll know the constant arising and passing away of all phenomena.

You should know that that which is arising and passing away is only the activity of mind. When something arises, it passes away and is followed by further arising and passing away. In the way of Dhamma we call this arising and passing away 'birth and death;' and this is everything — this is all there is. When suffering has arisen, it passes away and, when it has passed away, suffering arises again. There's just suffering arising and passing away. When you see this much, you'll be able to know constantly this arising and passing away; and, when your knowing is constant, you'll see that this is really all there is. Everything is just birth and death. It's not as if there is anything which carries on. There's just this arising and passing away as it is — that's all.

This kind of seeing will give rise to a tranquil feeling of dispassion towards the world. Such a feeling arises when we see that actually there is nothing worth wanting; there is only arising and passing away,

a being born followed by a dying. This is when the mind arrives at 'letting go,' letting everything go according to its own nature. Things arise and pass away in our mind, and we know. When happiness arises, we know; when dissatisfaction arises, we know. And this 'knowing happiness' means that we don't identify with it as being *ours*. When we no longer identify with and cling to happiness and suffering, we are simply left with the natural way of things.

So we say that mental activity is like the deadly poisonous cobra. If we don't interfere with a cobra, it simply goes its own way. Even though it may be extremely poisonous, we are not affected by it; we don't go near it or take hold of it, and it doesn't bite us. The cobra does what is natural for a cobra to do. That's the way it is. If you are clever you'll leave it alone. And so you let be that which is good. You also let be that which is not good — let it be according to its own nature. Let be your liking and your disliking, the same way as you don't interfere with the cobra.

So, one who is intelligent will have this kind of attitude towards the various moods that arise in the mind. When goodness arises, we let it be good, but we know also. We understand its nature. And, too, we let be the not-good, we let it be according to its nature. We don't take hold of it because we don't want anything. We don't want evil, neither do we want good. We want neither heaviness nor lightness, happiness nor suffering. When, in this way, our wanting is at an end, peace is firmly established.

When we have this kind of peace established in our minds, we can depend on it. This peace, we say, has arisen out of confusion. Confusion has ended. The Buddha called the attainment of final enlightenment an 'extinguishing', in the same way that fire is

extinguished. We extinguish fire at the place at which it appears. Wherever it is hot, that's where we can make it cool. And so it is with enlightenment. Nibbana is found in *Samsara**. Enlightenment and delusion exist in the same place, just as do hot and cold. It's hot where it was cold and cold where it was hot. When heat arises, the coolness disappears and when there is coolness, there's no more heat. In this way Nibbana and Samsara are the same.

We are told to put an end to Samsara, which means to stop the ever-turning cycle of confusion. This putting an end to confusion is extinguishing the fire. When external fire is extinguished there is coolness. When the internal fires of sensual craving, aversion and delusion are put out, then this is coolness also.

This is the nature of enlightenment; it's the extinguishing of fire, the cooling of that which was hot. This is peace. This is the end of Samsara, the cycle of birth and death. When you arrive at enlightenment, this is how it is. It's an ending of the ever-turning and ever-changing, an ending of greed, aversion and delusion in our minds. We talk about it in terms of happiness because this is how worldly people understand the ideal to be, but in reality it has gone beyond. It is beyond both happiness and suffering. It's perfect peace.

So as you go you should take this teaching which I have given you and contemplate it carefully. Your stay here hasn't been easy and I have had little opportunity to give you instruction, but in this time you have been able to study the real meaning of our practice. May this practice lead you to happiness; may it help you grow in Truth. May you be freed from the suffering of birth and death.

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* Samsara: Lit. perpetual wandering, is a name by which is designated the sea of life, ever restlessly heaving up and down, the symbol of this continuous process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying.

READING THE NATURAL MIND*

Our way of practice is looking closely at things and making them clear. We're persistent and constant, yet not rushed or hurried. Neither are we too slow. It's a matter of gradually feeling our way and bringing it together. However, all of this bringing it together is working towards something, there is a point to our practice.

For most of us, when we first start to practise, it's nothing other than desire. We start to practise because of wanting. At this stage our wanting is wanting in the wrong way. That is, it's deluded. It's wanting mixed with wrong understanding.

If wanting is not mixed with wrong understanding like this, we say that it's wanting with wisdom. It's not deluded — it's wanting with right understanding. In a case like this we say that it's due to a person's *parami*** or past accumulations of spiritual qualities. However, this isn't the case with everyone.

Some people don't want to have desires, or they want not to have desires, because they think that our practice is directed at not wanting. However, if there is no desire, then there's no way of practice.

We can see this for ourselves. The Buddha and all his disciples practised to put an end to defilements. We must want to practise and must want to put an end to defilements. We must want to have peace of mind and want not to have confusion. However, if this wanting is

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* An informal talk given to a group of newly ordained monks after the evening chanting, middle of the Rains Retreat, 1978

** see glossary

mixed with wrong understanding, then it will only amount to more difficulties for us. If we are honest about it, we really know nothing at all. Or, what we do know is of no consequence, since we are unable to use it properly.

Everybody, including the Buddha, started out like this, with the desire to practise — wanting to have peace of mind and wanting not to have confusion and suffering. These two kinds of desire have exactly the same value. If not understood then both wanting to be free from confusion and not wanting to have suffering are defilements. They're a foolish way of wanting — desire without wisdom.

In our practice we see this desire as either sensual indulgence or self-mortification. It's in this very conflict that our Teacher, the Buddha, was caught up, just this dilemma. He followed many ways of practice which merely ended up in these two extremes. And these days we are exactly the same. We are still afflicted by this duality, and because of it we keep falling from the Way.

However, this is how we must start out. We start out as worldly beings, as beings with defilements, with wanting devoid of wisdom, desire without right understanding. If we lack proper understanding, then both kinds of desire work against us. Whether it's wanting or not wanting, it's still craving (*tanha**). If we don't understand these two things then we won't know how to deal with them when they arise. We will feel that to go forward is wrong and to go backwards is wrong, and yet we can't stop. Whatever we do we just find more wanting. This is because of the lack of wisdom and because of craving.

It's right here, with this wanting and not wanting, that we can understand the Dhamma. The Dhamma which we are looking for exists

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* see glossary

right here, but we don't see it. Rather, we persist in our efforts to stop wanting. We want things to be a certain way and not any other way. Or, we want them not to be a certain way, but to be another way. Really these two things are the same. They are part of the same duality.

Perhaps we may not realize that the Buddha and all of his disciples had this kind of wanting. However the Buddha understood regarding wanting and not wanting. He understood that they are simply the activity of mind, that such things merely appear in a flash and then disappear. These kinds of desires are going on all the time. When there is wisdom, we don't identify with them — we are free from clinging. Whether it's wanting or not wanting, we simply see it as such. In reality it's merely the activity of the natural mind. When we take a close look, we see clearly that this is how it is.

The Wisdom of Everyday Experience

So it's here that our practice of contemplation will lead us to understanding. Let us take an example, the example of a fisherman pulling in his net with a big fish in it. How do you think he feels about pulling it in? If he's afraid that the fish will escape, he'll be rushed and start to struggle with the net, grabbing and tugging at it. Before he knows it, the big fish has escaped — he was trying too hard.

In the olden days they would talk like this. They taught that we should do it gradually, carefully gathering it in without losing it. This is how it is in our practice; we gradually feel our way with it, carefully gathering it in without losing it. Sometimes it happens that we don't feel like doing it. Maybe we don't want to look or maybe we don't want to know, but we keep on with it. We continue feeling for it. This is practice: if we feel like doing it, we do it, and if we don't feel like

doing it, we do it just the same. We just keep on doing it.

If we are enthusiastic about our practice, the power of our faith will give energy to what we are doing. But at this stage we are still without wisdom. Even though we are very energetic, we will not derive much benefit from our practice. We may continue with it for a long time and a feeling will arise that we aren't going to find the way. We may feel that we cannot find peace and tranquillity, or that we aren't sufficiently equipped to do the practice. Or maybe we feel that this Way just isn't possible anymore. So we give up.

At this point we must be very, very careful. We must use great patience and endurance. It's just like pulling in the big fish - we gradually feel our way with it. We carefully pull it in. The struggle won't be too difficult, so without stopping we continue pulling it in. Eventually, after some time, the fish becomes tired and stops fighting and we're able to catch it easily. Usually this is how it happens, we practise gradually gathering it together.

It's in this manner that we do our contemplation. If we don't have any particular knowledge or learning in the theoretical aspects of the Teaching, we contemplate according to our everyday experience. We use the knowledge which we already have, the knowledge derived from our everyday experience. This kind of knowledge is natural to the mind. Actually, whether we study about it or not, we have the reality of the mind right here already. The mind is the mind whether we have learned about it or not. This is why we say that whether the Buddha is born in the world or not, everything is the way it is. Everything already exists according to its own nature. This natural condition doesn't change, nor does it go anywhere. It just is that way. This is called the sacca-dhamma. However, if we don't understand

about this sacca-dhamma, we won't be able to recognize it.

Constant Effort

Until we are able to stop our mind, until we reach tranquillity, the mind will just continue as before. It's for this reason that the teacher says, "Just keep on doing it, keep on with the practice." Maybe we think, "If I don't yet understand, how can I do it?" Until we are able to practise properly, wisdom doesn't arise. So we say just keep on with it. If we practise without stopping we'll begin to think about what we are doing. We'll start to consider our practice.

Nothing happens immediately, so in the beginning we can't see any results from our practice. This is like the example I have often given you of the man who tries to make fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together. He says to himself, "They say there's fire here," and he begins rubbing energetically. He's very impetuous. He rubs on and on but his impatience doesn't end. He wants to have that fire. He keeps wanting to have that fire, but the fire doesn't come. So he gets discouraged and stops to rest for awhile. He starts again but the going is slow, so he rests again. By then the heat has disappeared; he didn't keep at it long enough. He rubs and rubs until he tires and then he stops altogether. Not only is he tired, but he becomes more and more discouraged until he gives up completely,"There's no fire here." Actually he was doing the work, but there wasn't enough heat to start a fire. The fire was there all the time but he didn't carry on to the end.

This sort of experience causes meditators to get discouraged in their practice, and so they restlessly change from one practice to another. And this sort of experience is also similar to our own practice. It's the same for everybody. Why? Because we are still grounded in

defilements. The Buddha had defilements also, but he had a lot of wisdom in this respect. While still worldlings, the Buddha and the arahants were just the same as us. If we are still worldlings then we don't think rightly. Thus when wanting arises we don't see it, and when not wanting arises we don't see it. Sometimes we feel stirred up, and sometimes we feel contented. When we have not wanting we have a kind of contentment, but we also have a kind of confusion. When we have wanting this can be contentment and confusion of another kind. It's all intermixed in this way.

Knowing Oneself and Knowing Others

The Buddha taught us to contemplate our body, for example: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin ... it's all body. Take a look. We are told to investigate right here. If we don't see these things clearly as they are in ourselves, we won't understand regarding other people. We won't see others clearly nor will we see ourselves. However, if we do understand and see clearly the nature of our own bodies, our doubts and wonderings regarding others will disappear. This is because body and mind are the same for everybody. It isn't necessary to go and examine all the bodies in the world since we know that they are the same as us — we are the same as them. If we have this kind of understanding then our burden becomes lighter. Without this kind of understanding, all we do is develop a heavier burden. In order to know about others we would have to go and examine everybody in the entire world. That would be very difficult. We would soon become discouraged.

Our *Vinaya* (Code of Monks' Discipline) is similar to this. When we look at our Vinaya we feel that it's very difficult. We must keep

every rule, study every rule, review our practice with every rule. If we just think about it, "Oh, it's impossible!" We read the literal meaning of all the numerous rules and, if we merely follow our thinking about them, we could well decide that it's beyond our ability to keep them all. Anyone who has had this kind of attitude towards the Vinaya has the same feeling about it — there are a lot of rules.

The scriptures tell us that we must examine ourselves regarding each and every rule and keep them all strictly. We must know them all and observe them perfectly. This is the same as saying that to understand about others we must go and examine absolutely everybody. This is a very heavy attitude. And it's like that because we take what is said literally. If we follow the textbooks, this is the way we must go. Some teachers teach in this manner — strict adherence to what the textbooks day. It just can't work that way. If we know how to guard our own minds, then it is the same as observing all of the numerous rules of the Vinaya.

Actually, if we study theory like this, our practice won't develop at all. In fact our faith will disappear, our faith in the Way will be destroyed. This is because we haven't yet understood. When there is wisdom we will understand that all the people in the entire world really amount to just this one person. They are the same as this very being. So we study and contemplate our own body and mind. With seeing and understanding the nature of our own body and mind comes understanding the bodies and minds of everyone. And so, in this way, the weight of our practice becomes lighter.

The Buddha said to teach and instruct ourselves - nobody else can do it for us. When we study and understand the nature of our own existence, we will understand the nature of all existence. Everyone is

really the same. We are all the same 'make' and come from the same company — our skins are just different shades, that's all! Just like 'Bort-hai' and 'Tum-jai'. They are both pain-killers and do the same thing, but one brand is called 'Bort-hai' and the other 'Tum-jai'. Really they aren't different.

You will find that this way of seeing things gets easier and easier as you gradually bring it all together. We call this 'feeling our way', and this is how we begin to practise. We'll become skilled at doing it. We keep on with it until we arrive at understanding, and when this understanding arises, we will see reality clearly.

Theory and Practice

So we continue this practice until we have a feeling for it. After a time, depending on our own particular tendencies and abilities, a new kind of understanding arises. This we call Investigation of Dhamma (*Dhamma-vicaya*), and this is how the Seven Factors of Enlightenment arise in the mind. Investigation of Dhamma is one of them. The others are: Mindfulness, Energy, Rapture, Tranquillity, Concentration and Equanimity.

If we have studied about the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, then we'll know what the books say, but we won't have seen the real Factors of Enlightenment. The real Factors of Enlightenment arise in the mind. Thus the Buddha came to give us all the various teachings. All the Enlightened Ones have taught the way out of suffering and their recorded teachings we call the theoretical teachings. This theory originally came from the practice, but it has become merely book learning or words.

The real Factors of Enlightenment have disappeared because we don't know them within ourselves, we don't see them within our own

minds. If they arise they arise out of practice. If they arise out of practice then they are factors leading to insight into the Dhamma and we can use their arising as an indication that our practice is correct. If we are not practising rightly, such things will not appear.

If we practise in the right way, then we can see Dhamma. So we say to keep on practising, feeling your way gradually and continually investigating. Don't think that what you are looking for can be found other than right here.

One of my senior disciples had been learning Pali at a study temple before he came here. He hadn't been very successful with his studies so he thought that, since monks who practise meditation are able to see and understand everything just by sitting, he would come and try this way. He came here to Wat Pah Pong with the intention of sitting in meditation so that he would be able to translate Pali scriptures. He had this kind of understanding about practice. So I explained to him about our way. He had misunderstood completely. He had thought it an easy matter just to sit and make everything clear.

If we talk about understanding Dhamma then both study monks and practice monks use the same words. But the actual understanding which comes from studying theory and that which comes from practising Dhamma is not quite the same. It may seem to be the same, but one is more profound. One is deeper than the other. The kind of understanding which comes from practice leads to surrender, to giving up. Until there is complete surrender we persevere - we persist in our contemplation. If desires or anger and dislike arise in our mind, we aren't indifferent to them. We don't just leave them but rather take them and investigate to see how and from where they arise. If such moods are already in our mind, then we contemplate and see how they

work against us. We see them clearly and understand the difficulties which we cause ourselves by believing and following them. This kind of understanding is not found anywhere other than in our own pure mind.

It's because of this that those who study theory and those who practise meditation misunderstand each other. Usually those who emphasize study say things like this, "Monks who only practise meditation just follow their own opinions. They have no basis for their teaching." Actually, in one sense, these two ways of study and practice are exactly the same thing. It can help us to understand if we think of it like the front and back of our hand. If we put our hand out, it seems as if the back of the hand has disappeared. Actually the back of our hand hasn't disappeared anywhere, it's just hidden underneath. When we turn our hand over, the same thing happens to the palm of the hand. It doesn't go anywhere, it's merely hidden underneath.

We should keep this in mind when we consider practice. If we think that it has 'disappeared', we'll go off to study, hoping to get results. But it doesn't matter how much you study *about* Dhamma, you'll never understand, because you won't know in accordance with Truth. If we do understand the real nature of Dhamma, then it becomes letting go. This is surrender — removing attachment, not clinging anymore, or, if there still is clinging, it becomes less and less. There is this kind of difference between the two ways of study and practice.

When we talk about study, we can understand it like this: our eye is a subject of study, our ear is a subject of study — everything is a subject of study. We can know that form is like this and like that, but we attach to form and don't know the way out. We can distinguish sounds, but then we attach to them. Forms, sounds, smells, tastes,

bodily feelings and mental impressions are all like a snare to entrap all beings.

To investigate these things is our way of practising Dhamma. When some feeling arises we turn to our understanding to appreciate it. If we are knowledgeable regarding theory, we will immediately turn to that and see how such and such a thing happens like this and then becomes that ... and so on. If we haven't learned theory in this way, then we have just the natural state of our mind to work with. This is our Dhamma. If we have wisdom then we'll be able to examine this natural mind of ours and use this as our subject of study. It's exactly the same thing. Our natural mind is theory. The Buddha said to take whatever thoughts and feelings arise and investigate them. Use the reality of our natural mind as our theory. We rely on this reality.

Insight Meditation (Vipassana)

If you have faith it doesn't matter whether you have studied theory or not. If our believing mind leads us to develop practice, if it leads us to constantly develop energy and patience, then study doesn't matter. We have mindfulness as a foundation for our practice. We are mindful in all bodily postures, whether sitting, standing, walking or lying down. And if there is mindfulness there will be clear comprehension to accompany it. Mindfulness and clear comprehension will arise together. They may arise so rapidly, however, that we can't tell them apart. But, when there is mindfulness, there will also be clear comprehension.

When our mind is firm and stable, mindfulness will arise quickly and easily and this is also where we have wisdom. Sometimes, though, wisdom is insufficient or doesn't arise at the right time. There may be

mindfulness and clear comprehension, but these alone are not enough to deal with the situation. Generally, if mindfulness and clear comprehension are a foundation of mind, then wisdom will be there to assist. However, we must constantly develop this wisdom through the practice of Insight Meditation. This means that whatever arises in the mind can be the object of mindfulness and clear comprehension. But we must see according to anicca, dukkha, anatta. Anicca is the basis. Dukkha refers to the quality of unsatisfactoriness, and Anatta says that it is without individual entity. We see that it's simply a sensation that has arisen, that it has no self, it is no entity and that it disappears of its own accord. Just that! Someone who is deluded, someone who doesn't have wisdom, will miss this occasion, they won't be able to use these things to advantage.

If wisdom is present then mindfulness and clear comprehension will be right there with it. However, at this initial stage the wisdom may not be perfectly clear. Thus mindfulness and clear comprehension aren't able to catch every object, but wisdom comes to help. It can see what quality of mindfulness there is and what kind of sensation has arisen. Or, in its most general aspect, whatever mindfulness there is or whatever sensation there is, it's all Dhamma.

The Buddha took the practice of Insight Meditation as his foundation. He saw that this mindfulness and clear comprehension were both uncertain and unstable. Anything that's unstable, and which we want to have stable, causes us to suffer. We want things to be according to our own desires, but we must suffer because things just aren't that way. This is the influence of a tainted mind, the influence of a mind which is lacking wisdom.

When we practise we tend to become caught up in wanting it

easy, wanting it to be the way we like it. We don't have to go very far to understand about such an attitude. Merely look at this body. Is it ever really the way we want it? One minute we like it to be one way and the next minute we like it to be another way. Have we ever really had it the way we liked? The nature of our bodies and minds is exactly the same in this regard. It simply is the way it is.

This point in our practice can be easily missed. Usually, whatever we feel doesn't agree with us, we throw out; whatever doesn't please us, we throw out. We don't stop to think whether the way we like and dislike things is really the correct way or not. We merely think that the things we find disagreeable must be wrong, and those which we find agreeable must be right.

This is where craving comes from. When we receive stimuli by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind, a feeling of liking or disliking arises. This shows that the mind is full of attachment. So the Buddha gave us this teaching of impermanence. He gave us a way to contemplate things. If we cling to something which isn't permanent, then we'll experience suffering. There's no reason why we should want to have these things in accordance with our likes and dislikes. It isn't possible for us to make things be that way. We don't have that kind of authority or power. Regardless of however we may like things to be, everything is already the way it is. Wanting like this is not the way out of suffering.

Here we can see how the mind which is deluded understands in one way, and the mind which is not deluded understands in another way. When the mind with wisdom receives some sensation for example, it sees it as something not to be clung to or identified with. This is what indicates wisdom. If there isn't any wisdom then we

merely follow our stupidity. This stupidity is not seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. That which we like we see as good and right. That which we don't like we see as not good. We can't arrive at Dhamma this way — wisdom cannot arise. If we can see this, then wisdom arises.

The Buddha firmly established the practice of Insight Meditation in his mind and used it to investigate all the various mental impressions. Whatever arose in his mind he investigated like this: even though we like it, it's uncertain. It's suffering, because these things which are constantly rising and falling don't follow the influence of our minds. All these things are not a being or a self, they don't belong to us. The Buddha taught us to see them just as they are. It is this principle on which we stand in practice.

We understand then, that we aren't able to just bring about various moods as we wish. Both good moods and bad moods are going to come up. Some of them are helpful and some of them are not. If we don't understand rightly regarding these things, then we won't be able to judge correctly. Rather we will go running after craving — running off following our desires.

Sometimes we feel happy and sometimes we feel sad, but this is natural. Sometimes we'll feel pleased and at other times disappointed. What we like we hold as good, and what we don't like we hold as bad. In this way we separate ourselves further and further from Dhamma. When this happens, we aren't able to understand or recognize Dhamma, and thus we are confused. Desires increase because our minds have nothing but delusion.

This is how we talk about the mind. It isn't necessary to go far away from ourselves to find understanding. We simply see that these

states of mind aren't permanent. We see that they are unsatisfactory and that they aren't a permanent self. If we continue to develop our practice in this way, we call it the practice of Vipassana or Insight Meditation. We say that it is recognizing the contents of our mind and in this way we develop wisdom.

Samatha* (Calm) Meditation

Our practice of Samatha is like this: We establish the practice of mindfulness on the in-and-out breath, for example, as a foundation or means of steadying the mind. By having the mind follow the flow of the breath it becomes steadfast, calm and still. This practice of calming the mind is called Samatha Meditation. It's necessary to do a lot of this kind of practice because the mind is full of many disturbances. It's very confused. We can't say how many years or how many lives it's been this way. If we sit and contemplate we'll see that there's a lot that doesn't conduce to peace and calm and a lot that leads to confusion.

For this reason the Buddha taught that we must find a meditation subject which is suitable to our particular tendencies, a way of practice which is right for our character. For example, going over and over the parts of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin, can be very calming. The mind can become very peaceful from this practice. If contemplating these five things leads to calm, it's because they are appropriate objects for contemplation according to our tendencies. Whatever we find to be appropriate in this way, we can consider to be our practice and use it to subdue the defilements.

Another example is recollection of death. For those who still have strong greed, aversion and delusion and find them difficult to

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* see glossary

contain, it's useful to take this subject of personal death as a meditation. We'll come to see that everybody has to die, whether rich or poor. We'll see both good and evil people die. Everybody must die. Developing this practice we find that an attitude of dispassion arises. The more we practise the easier our sitting produces calm. This is because it's a suitable and appropriate practice for us. If this practice of Calm Meditation is not agreeable to our particular tendencies, it won't produce this attitude of dispassion. If the object is truly suited to us then we'll find it arising regularly, without great difficulty, and we'll find ourselves thinking about it often.

Regarding this we can see an example in our everyday lives. When laypeople bring trays of many different types of food to offer the monks, we taste them to see which we like. When we have tried each one we can tell which is most agreeable to us. This is just an example. That which we find agreeable to our taste we'll eat; we find that most suitable. We won't bother about the other various dishes.

The practice of concentrating our attention on the in-and-out breath is an example of a type of meditation which is suitable for us all. It seems that when we go around doing various different practices, we don't feel so good. But as soon as we sit and observe our breath we have a good feeling, we can see it clearly. There's no need to go looking far away, we can use what is close to us and this will be better for us. Just watch the breath. It goes out and comes in, out and in —- we watch it like this. For a long time we keep watching our breathing in and out and slowly our mind settles. Other activity will arise but we feel like it is distant from us. Just like when we live apart from each other and don't feel so close anymore. We don't have the same strong contact anymore or perhaps no contact at all.

When we have a feeling for this practice of mindfulness of breathing, it becomes easier. If we keep on with this practice we gain experience and become skilled at knowing the nature of the breath. We'll know what it's like when it's long and what it's like when it's short.

Looking at it one way we can talk about the breath as food. While sitting or walking we breathe, while sleeping we breathe, while awake we breathe. If we don't breathe then we die. If we think about it we see that we exist only with the help of food. If we don't eat ordinary food for ten minutes, an hour or even a day, it doesn't matter. This is a coarse kind of food. However, if we don't breathe for even a short time we'll die. If we don't breathe for five or ten minutes we would be dead. Try it!

One who is practising mindfulness of breathing should have this kind of understanding. The knowledge that comes from this practice is indeed wonderful. If we don't contemplate then we won't see the breath as food, but actually we are 'eating' air all the time, in, out, in, out … all the time. Also you'll find that the more you contemplate in this way, the greater the benefits derived from the practice and the more delicate the breath becomes. It may even happen that the breath stops. It appears as if we aren't breathing at all. Actually, the breath is passing through the pores of the skin. This is called the 'delicate breath'. When our mind is perfectly calm, normal breathing can cease in this way. We need not be at all startled or afraid. If there's no breathing what should we do? Just know it. Know that there is no breathing, that's all. This is the right practice here.

Here we are talking about the way of Samatha practice, the practice of developing calm. If the object which we are using is right

and appropriate for us, it will lead to this kind of experience. This is the beginning, but there is enough in this practice to take us all the way, or at least to where we can see clearly and continue in strong faith. If we keep on with contemplation in this manner, energy will come to us. This is similar to the water in an urn. We put in water and keep it topped up. We keep on filling the urn with water and thereby the insects which live in the water don't die. Making effort and doing our everyday practice is just like this. It all comes back to practice. We feel very good and peaceful.

This peacefulness comes from our one-pointed state of mind. This one-pointed state of mind, however, can be very troublesome, since we don't want other mental states to disturb us. Actually, other mental states do come and, if we think about it, that in itself can be the one-pointed state of mind. It's like when we see various men and women, but we don't have the same feeling about them as we do about our mother and father. In reality all men are male just like our father and all women are female just like our mother, but we don't have the same feeling about them. We feel that our parents are more important. They hold greater value for us.

This is how it should be with our one-pointed state of mind. We should have the same attitude towards it as we would have towards our own mother and father. All other activity which arises we appreciate in the same way as we feel towards men and women in general. We don't stop seeing them, we simply acknowledge their presence and don't ascribe to them the same value as our parents.

Undoing the Knot

When our practice of Samatha arrives at calm, the mind will be

clear and bright. The activity of mind will become less and less. The various mental impressions which arise will be fewer. When this happens great peace and happiness will arise, but we may attach to that happiness. We should contemplate that happiness as uncertain. We should also contemplate unhappiness as uncertain and impermanent. We'll understand that all the various feelings are not lasting and not to be clung to. We see things in this way because there's wisdom. We'll understand that things are this way according to their nature.

If we have this kind of understanding it's like taking hold of one strand of a rope which makes up a knot. If we pull it in the right direction, the knot will loosen and begin to untangle. It'll no longer be so tight or so tense. This is similar to understanding that it doesn't always have to be this way. Before, we felt that things would always be the way they were and, in so doing, we pulled the knot tighter and tighter. This tightness is suffering. Living that way is very tense. So we loosen the knot a little and relax. Why do we loosen it? Because it's tight! If we don't cling to it then we can loosen it. It's not a permanent condition that must always be that way.

We use the teaching of impermanence as our basis. We see that both happiness and unhappiness are not permanent. We see them as not dependable. There is absolutely nothing that's permanent. With this kind of understanding we gradually stop believing in the various moods and feelings which come up in the mind. Wrong understanding will decrease to the same degree that we stop believing in it. This is what is meant by undoing the knot. It continues to become looser. Attachment will be gradually uprooted.

Disenchantment

When we come to see impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self in ourselves, in this body and mind, in this world, then we'll find that a kind of boredom will arise. This isn't the everyday boredom that makes us feel like not wanting to know or see or say anything, or not wanting to have anything to do with anybody at all. That isn't real boredom, it still has attachment, we still don't understand. We still have feelings of envy and resentment and are still clinging to the things which cause us suffering.

This kind of boredom which the Buddha talked about is a condition without aversion or attraction. It arises out of seeing everything as impermanent. When pleasant feeling arises in our mind, we see that it isn't lasting. This is the kind of boredom we have. We call it nibbida or disenchantment. That means that it's far from sensual craving and passion. We see nothing as being worthy of desire. Whether or not things accord with our likes and dislikes, it doesn't matter to us, we don't identify with them. We don't give them any special value.

Practising like this we don't give things reason to cause us difficulty. We have seen suffering and have seen that identifying with moods can not give rise to any real happiness: it causes clinging to happiness and unhappiness and clinging to liking and disliking, which is in itself the cause of suffering. When we are still clinging like this we don't have an even-minded attitude towards things. Some states of mind we like and others we dislike. If we are still liking and disliking, then both happiness and unhappiness are suffering. It's this kind of attachment which causes suffering. The Buddha taught that whatever causes us suffering is in itself unsatisfactory.

The four Noble Truths

Hence we understand that the Buddha's Teaching is to know suffering and to know what causes it to arise. And further, we should know freedom from suffering and the way of practice which leads to freedom. He taught us to know just these four things. When we understand these four things we'll be able to recognize suffering when it arises and will know that is has a cause. We'll know that it didn't just drift in. When we wish to be free from this suffering, we'll be able to eliminate its cause.

Why do we have this feeling of suffering, this feeling of unsatisfactoriness? We'll see that it's because we are clinging to our various likes and dislikes. We come to know that we are suffering because of our own actions. We suffer because we ascribe value to things. So we say "know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know freedom from suffering and know the Way to this freedom". When we know about suffering we keep untangling the knot. But we must be sure to untangle it by pulling in the right direction. That is to say, we must know that this is how things are. Attachment will be uprooted. This is the practice which puts an end to our suffering.

Know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know freedom from suffering and know the Path which leads out of suffering. This is *Magga* (Path). It goes like this: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. When we have the right understanding regarding these things, then we have the path. These things can put an end to suffering. They lead us to morality, concentration and wisdom.

We must clearly understand these four things. We must want to

understand. We must want to see these things in terms of reality. When we see these four things we call this sacca-dhamma or Truth. Whether we look inside or in front or to the right or left, all we see is sacca-dhamma. We simply see that everything is the way it is. For someone who has arrived at Dhamma, someone who really understands Dhamma, wherever they go, everything will be Dhamma.

JUST DO IT! *

Just keep breathing in and out like this. Don't be interested in anything else. It doesn't matter even if someone is standing on their head with their ass in the air. Don't pay it any attention. Just stay with the in-breath and the out-breath. Concentrate your awareness on the breath. Just keep doing it.

Don't take up anything else. There's no need to think about gaining things. Don't take up anything at all. Simply know the in-breath and the out-breath. The in-breath and the out-breath. *Bud* on the in-breath; *Dho* on the out-breath. Just stay with the breath in this way until you are aware of the in-breath and aware of the out-breath.....aware of the in-breath....aware of the out-breath. Be aware in this way until the mind is peaceful, without irritation, without agitation, merely the breath going out and coming in. Let your mind remain in this state. You don't need a goal yet. It's this state that is the first stage of practice.

If the mind is at ease, if it's at peace then it will be naturally aware. As you keep doing it, the breath diminishes, becomes softer. The body becomes pliable, the mind becomes pliable. It's a natural process. Sitting is comfortable: you're not dull, you don't nod, you're not sleepy. The mind has a natural fluency about whatever it does. It is still. It is at peace. And then when you leave the samadhi, you say to yourself, 'Wow, what was that?' You recall the peace that you've just experienced. And you never forget it.

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* A lively talk, in Lao dialect, given to the Assembly of newly-ordained monks at Wat Pah Pong on the day of entering the Rains Retreat, July 1978

The thing which follows along with us is called sati, the power of recollection, and sampajanna, self-awareness. Whatever we say or do, wherever we go, on almsround or whatever, in eating the meal, washing our almsbowl, then be aware of what it's all about. Be constantly mindful. Follow the mind.

When you're practising walking meditation *(cankama*)*, have a walking path, say from one tree to another, about 50 feet in length. Walking cankama is the same as sitting meditation. Focus your awareness: "Now, I am going to put forth effort. With strong recollection and self-awareness I am going to pacify my mind." The object of concentration depends on the person. Find what suits you. Some people spread *metta** to all sentient beings and then leading with their right foot, walk at a normal pace, using the mantra 'Buddho' in conjunction with the walking. Continually being aware of that object. If the mind becomes agitated then stop, calm the mind and then resume walking. Constantly self-aware. Aware at the beginning of the path, aware at every stage of the path, the beginning, the middle and the end. Make this knowing continuous.

This is a method, focussing on walking cankama. Walking cankama means walking to and fro. It's not easy. Some people see us walking up and down and think we're crazy. They don't realize that walking cankama gives rise to great wisdom. Walk to and fro. If you're tired then stand and still your mind. Focus on making the breathing comfortable. When it is reasonably comfortable then switch the attention to walking again.

The postures change by themselves. Standing, walking, sitting, lying down. They change. We can't just sit all the time, stand all the

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* see glossary

time or lie down all the time. We have to spend our time with these different postures, make all four postures beneficial. This is the action. We just keep doing it. It's not easy.

To make it easy to visualise, take this glass and set it down here for two minutes. When the two minutes are up then move it over there for two minutes. Then move it over here for two minutes. Keep doing that. Do it again and again until you start to suffer, until you doubt, until wisdom arises. "What am I thinking about, lifting a glass backwards and forwards like a madman." The mind will think in its habitual way according to the phenomena. It doesn't matter what anyone says. Just keep lifting that glass. Every two minutes, okay - don't daydream, not five minutes. As soon as two minutes are up then move it over here. Focus on that. This is the matter of action.

Looking at the in-breaths and out-breaths is the same. Sit with your right foot resting on your left leg, sit straight, watch the inhalation to its full extent until it completely disappears in the abdomen. When the inhalation is complete then allow the breath out until the lungs are empty. Don't force it. It doesn't matter how long or short or soft the breath is, let it be just right for you. Sit and watch the inhalation and the exhalation, make yourself comfortable with that. Don't allow your mind to get lost. If it gets lost then stop, look to see where it's got to, why it is not following the breath. Go after it and bring it back. Get it to stay with the breath, and, without doubt, one day you will see the reward. Just keep doing it. Do it as if you won't gain anything, as if nothing will happen, as if you don't know who's doing it, but keep doing it anyway. Like rice in the barn. You take it out and sow it in the fields, as if you were throwing it away, sow it throughout the fields, without being interested in it, and yet it sprouts, rice plants grow up,

you transplant it and you've got sweet green rice. That's what it's about.

This is the same. Just sit there. Sometimes you might think, "Why am I watching the breath so intently. Even if I didn't watch it, it would still keep going in and out."

Well, you'll always finds something to think about. That's a view. It is an expression of the mind. Forget it. Keep trying over and over again and make the mind peaceful.

Once the mind is at peace, the breath will diminish, the body will become relaxed, the mind will become subtle. They will be in a state of balance until it will seem as if there is no breath, but nothing happens to you. When you reach this point, don't panic, don't get up and run out, because you think you've stopped breathing. It just means that your mind is at peace. You don't have to do anything. Just sit there and look at whatever is present.

Sometimes you may wonder, "Eh, am I breathing?" This is the same mistake. It is the thinking mind. Whatever happens, allow things to take their natural course, no matter what feeling arises. Know it, look at it. But don't be deluded by it. Keep doing it, keep doing it. Do it often. After the meal, air your robe on a line, and get straight out onto the walking meditation path. Keep thinking 'Buddho, Buddho'. Think it all the time that you're walking. Concentrate on the word 'Buddho' as you walk. Wear the path down, wear it down until it's a trench and it's half way up your calves, or up to your knees. Just keep walking.

It's not just strolling along in a perfunctory way, thinking about this and that for a length of the path, and then going up into your hut and looking at your sleeping mat, "How inviting!" Then laying down

and snoring away like a pig. If you do that you won't get anything from the practice at all.

Keep doing it until you're fed up and then see how far that laziness goes. Keep looking until you come to the end of laziness. Whatever it is you experience you have to go all the way through it before you overcome it. It's not as if you can just repeat the word 'peace' to yourself and then as soon as you sit, you expect peace will arise like at the click of a switch, and when it doesn't then you give up, lazy. If that's the case you'll never be peaceful.

It's easy to talk about and hard to do. It's like monks who are thinking of disrobing saying, "Rice farming doesn't seem so difficult to me. I'd be better off as a rice farmer". They start farming without knowing about cows or buffaloes, harrows or ploughs, nothing at all. They find out that when you talk about farming it sounds easy, but when you actually try it you get to know exactly what the difficulties are.

Everyone would like to search for peace in that way. Actually, peace does lie right there, but you don't know it yet. You can follow after it, you can talk about it as much as you like, but you won't know what it is.

So, do it. Follow it until you know in pace with the breath, concentrating on the breath using the mantra 'Buddho'. Just that much. Don't let the mind wander off anywhere else. At this time have this knowing. Do this. Study just this much. Just keep doing it, doing it in this way. If you start thinking that nothing is happening, just carry on anyway. Just carry on regardless and you will get to know the breath.

Okay, so give it a try! If you sit in this way and the mind gets the hang of it, the mind will reach an optimum, 'just right' state. When

the mind is peaceful the self-awareness arises naturally. Then if you want to sit right through the night, you feel nothing, because the mind is enjoying itself. When you get this far, when you're good at it, then you might find you want to give Dhamma talks to your friends until the cows come home. That's how it goes sometimes.

It's like the time when Por Sang was still a postulant. One night he'd been walking cankama and then began to sit. His mind became lucid and sharp. He wanted to expound the Dhamma. He couldn't stop. I heard the sound of someone teaching over in that bamboo grove, really belting it out. I thought, "Is that someone giving a Dhamma talk, or is it the sound of someone complaining about something?" It didn't stop. So I got my flashlight and went over to have a look. I was right. There in the bamboo grove, sitting cross-legged in the light of a lantern, was Por Sang , talking so fast I couldn't keep up."

So I called out to him, "Por Sang, have you gone crazy?"

He said, "I don't know what it is, I just want to talk the Dhamma. I sit down and I've got to talk, I walk and I've got to talk. I've just got to expound the Dhamma all the time. I don't know where it's going to end."

I thought to myself, "When people practice the Dhamma there's no limit to the things that can happen."

So keep doing it, don't stop. Don't follow your moods. Go against the grain. Practise when you feel lazy and practice when you feel diligent. Practice when you're sitting and practice when you're walking. When you lay down, focus on your breathing and tell yourself, "I will not indulge in the pleasure of laying down." Teach your heart in this way. Get up as soon as you awaken, and carry on putting forth

effort.

Eating, tell yourself, "I eat this food, not with craving, but as medicine, to sustain my body for a day and a night, only in order that I may continue my practice."

When you lay down then teach your mind. When you eat then teach your mind. Maintain that attitude constantly. If you're going to stand up, then be aware of that. If you're going to lie down, then be aware of that. Whatever you do, then be aware. When you lie down, lie on your right side and focus on the breath, using the mantra 'Buddho' until you fall asleep. Then when you wake up it's as if 'Buddho' has been there all the time, it's not been interrupted. For peace to arise, there needs to be mindfulness there all the time. Don't go looking at other people. Don't be interested in other people's affairs; just be interested in your own affairs.

When you do sitting meditation, sit straight; don't lean your head too far back or too far forwards. Keep a balanced 'just-right' posture like a Buddha image. Then your mind will be bright and clear.

Endure for as long as you can before changing your posture. If it hurts, let it hurt. Don't be in a hurry to change your position. Don't think to yourself, "Oh! It's too much. Take a rest." Patiently endure until the pain has reached a peak, then endure some more.

Endure, endure until you can't keep up the mantra 'Buddho'. Then take the point where it hurts as your object. "Oh! Pain. Pain. Real pain." You can make the pain your meditation object rather than Buddho. Focus on it continuously. Keep sitting. When the pain has reached it's limit, see what happens.

The Buddha said that pain arises by itself and disappears by itself. Let it die; don't give up. Sometimes you may break out in a sweat.

Big beads, as large as corn kernels rolling down your chest. But when you've passed through painful feeling once, then you will know all about it. Keep doing it. Don't push yourself too much. Just keep steadily practising.

Be aware while you're eating. You chew and swallow. Where does the food go to? Know what foods agree with you and what foods disagree. Try gauging the amount of food. As you eat keep looking and when you think that after another five mouthfuls you'll be full, then stop and drink some water and you will have eaten just the right amount.

Try it. See whether or not you can do it. But that's not the way we usually do it. When we feel full we take another five mouthfuls. That's what the mind tells us. It doesn't know how to teach itself.

The Buddha told us to keep watching as we eat. Stop five mouthfuls before you're full and drink some water and it will be just right. If you sit or walk afterwards, then you don't feel heavy. Your meditation will improve. But we don't want to do it. We're full up and we take another five mouthfuls. That's the way that craving and defilement is, it goes a different way from the teachings of the Buddha. Someone who lacks a genuine wish to train their minds will be unable to do it. Keep watching your mind.

Be vigilant with sleep. Your success will depend on being aware of the skilful means. Sometimes the time you go to sleep may vary — some nights you have an early night and other times a late night. But try practising like this: whatever time you go to sleep, just sleep at one stretch. As soon as you wake up, then get up immediately. Don't go back to sleep. Whether you sleep a lot or a little, just sleep at one stretch. Make a resolution that as soon as you wake up, even if you

haven't had enough sleep, you will get up, wash your face, and then start to walk cankama or sit meditation. Know how to train yourself in this way. It's not something you can know through listening to someone else. You will know through training yourself, through practice, through doing it. And so I tell you to practice.

This practice of the heart is difficult. When you are doing sitting meditation, then let your mind have only one object. Let it stay with the inbreath and the outbreath and your mind will gradually become calm. If your mind is in turmoil, then it will have many objects. For instance, as soon as you sit, do you think of your home? Some people think of eating chinese noodles. When you're first ordained you feel hungry, don't you? You want to eat and drink. You think about all kinds of food. Your mind is going crazy. If that's what's going to happen, then let it. But as soon as you overcome it, then it will disappear.

Do it! Have you ever walked cankama? What was it like as you walked? Did your mind wander? If it did, then stop and let it come back. If it wanders off a lot, then don't breathe. Hold your breath until your lungs are about to burst. It will come back by itself. No matter how bad it is, if it's racing around all over the place, then hold your breath. As your lungs are about to burst, your mind will return. You must energize the mind. Training the mind isn't like training animals. The mind is truly hard to train. Don't be easily discouraged. If you hold your breath, you will be unable to think of anything and the mind will run back to you of its own accord.

It's like the water in this bottle. When we tip it out slowly then the water drips out…drip…drip…drip. But when we tip the bottle up further the water runs out in a continuous stream, not in separate drops

as before. Our mindfulness is similar. If we accelerate our efforts, practice in an even, continuous way, the mindfulness will be uninterrupted like a stream of water. No matter whether we are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, that knowledge is uninterrupted, flowing like a stream of water.

Our practice of the heart is like this. After a moment, it's thinking of this and thinking of that. It is agitated and mindfulness is not continuous. But whatever it thinks about, never mind, just keep putting forth effort. It will be like the drops of water that become more frequent until they join up and become a stream. Then our knowledge will be encompassing. Standing, sitting, walking or laying down, whatever you are doing, this knowing will look after you.

Start right now. Give it a try. But don't hurry. If you just sit there watching to see what will happen, then you'll be wasting your time. So be careful. If you try too hard then you won't be successful, but if you don't try at all then you won't be successful either.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS*

Q : I'm trying very hard in my practice but don't seem to be getting anywhere.

A : This is very important. Don't try to get anywhere in the practice. The very desire to be free or to be enlightened will be the desire that prevents your freedom. You can try as hard as you wish, practise ardently night and day, but if it is still with the desire to achieve in mind, you will never find peace. The energy from this desire will be cause for doubt and restlessness. No matter how long or how hard you practise, wisdom will not arise from desire. So, simply let go. Watch the mind and body mindfully but don't try to achieve anything. Don't cling even to the practice of enlightenment.

Q : What about sleep? How much should I sleep?

A : Don't ask me, I can't tell you. A good average for some is four hours a night. What is important, though, is that you watch and know yourself. If you try to go with too little sleep, the body will feel uncomfortable and mindfulness will be difficult to sustain. Too much sleep leads to a dull or restless mind. Find the natural balance for yourself. Carefully watch the mind and body and keep track of sleep needs until you find the optimum.

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* Notes taken over a period of a few days from a session of questions and answers with a group of Western monks, 1972

If you wake up and then roll over for a snooze, this is defilement. Establish mindfulness as soon as your eyes open.

Q : How about eating? How much should I eat?

A : Eating is the same as sleeping. You must know yourself. Food must be consumed to meet bodily needs. Look at your food as medicine. Are you eating so much that you only feel sleepy after the meal and are you getting fatter every day? Stop! Examine your own body and mind. There is no need to fast. Instead, experiment with the amount of food you take. Find the natural balance for your body. Put all your food together in your bowl following the ascetic practices. Then you can easily judge the amount you take. Watch yourself carefully as you eat. Know yourself. The essence of our practice is just this. There is nothing special you must do. Only watch. Examine yourself. Watch the mind. Then you will know what is the natural balance for your own practice.

Q : Are minds of Asians and Westerners different?

A : Basically there is no difference. Outer customs and language may appear different, but the human mind has natural characteristics which are the same for all people. Greed and hatred are the same in an Eastern or a Western mind. Suffering and the cessation of suffering are the same for all people.

Q : Is it advisable to read a lot or study the scriptures as a part of practice?

A : The Dhamma of the Buddha is not found in books. If you really want to see for yourself what the Buddha was talking about,

you don't need to bother with books. Watch your own mind. Examine to see how feelings come and go, how thoughts come and go. Don't be attached to anything. Just be mindful of whatever there is to see. This is the way to the truths of the Buddha. Be natural. Everything you do in your life here is a chance to practise. It is all Dhamma. When you do your chores, try to be mindful. If you are emptying a spittoon or cleaning a toilet, don't feel you are doing it as a favour for anyone else. There is Dhamma in emptying spittoons. Don't feel you are practising only when sitting still, cross-legged. Some of you have complained that there is not enough time to meditate. Is there enough time to breathe? This is your meditation: mindfulness, naturalness in whatever you do.

Q : Why don't we have daily interviews with the teacher?

A : If you have questions, you are welcome to come and ask them any time. But we don't need daily interviews here. If I answer your every little question, you will never understand the process of doubt in your own mind. It is essential that you learn to examine yourself, to interview yourself. Listen carefully to the lecture every few days, then use this teaching to compare with your own practice. Is it the same? Is it different? Why do you have doubts? Who is it that doubts? Only through self-examination can you understand.

Q : Sometimes I worry about the monks' discipline. If I kill insects accidentally, is this bad?

A : Sila or discipline and morality are essential to our practice, but you must not cling to the rules blindly. In killing animals or in

breaking other rules, the important thing is intention. Know your own mind. You should not be excessively concerned about the monks' discipline. If it is used properly, it supports the practice, but some monks are so worried about the petty rules that they can't sleep well. Discipline is not to be carried as a burden. In our practice here the foundation is discipline, good discipline plus the ascetic rules and practices. Being mindful and careful of even the many supporting rules as well as the basic 227 precepts has great benefit. It makes life very simple. There need be no wondering about how to act, so you can avoid thinking and instead just be simply mindful. The discipline enables us to live together harmoniously; the community runs smoothly. Outwardly everyone looks and acts the same. Discipline and morality are the stepping stones for further concentration and wisdom. By proper use of the monks' discipline and the ascetic precepts, we are forced to live simply, to limit our possessions. So here we have the complete practice of the Buddha: refrain from evil and do good, live simply keeping to basic needs, purify the mind. That is, be watchful of our mind and body in all postures: sitting, standing, walking or lying down, know yourself.

Q : What can I do about doubts? Some days I'm plagued with doubts about the practice or my own progress, or the teacher.

A : Doubting is natural. Everyone starts out with doubts. You can learn a great deal from them. What is important is that you don't identify with your doubts: that is, don't get caught up in them. This will spin your mind in endless circles. Instead, watch the whole process of doubting, of wondering. See who it is that

doubts. See how doubts come and go. Then you will no longer be victimized by your doubts. You will step outside of them and your mind will be quiet. You can see how all things come and go. Just let go of what you are attached to. Let go of your doubts and simply watch. This is how to end doubting.

Q : What about other methods of practice? These days there seem to be so many teachers and so many different systems of meditation that it is confusing.

A : It is like going into town. One can approach from the north, from the southeast, from many roads. Often these systems just differ outwardly. Whether you walk one way or another, fast or slow, if you are mindful, it is all the same. There is one essential point that all good practice must eventually come to - not clinging. In the end, all meditation systems must be let go of. Neither can one cling to the teacher. If a system leads to relinquishment, to not clinging, then it is correct practice.

You may wish to travel, to visit other teachers and try other systems. Some of you have already done so. This is a natural desire. You will find out that a thousand questions asked and knowledge of many systems will not bring you to the truth. Eventually you will get bored. You will see that only by stopping and examining your own mind can you find out what the Buddha talked about. No need to go searching outside yourself. Eventually you must return to face your own true nature. Here is where you can understand the Dhamma.

Q : A lot of times it seems that many monks here are not practising. They look sloppy or unmindful. This disturbs me.

A : It is not proper to watch other people. This will not help your practice. If you are annoyed, watch the annoyance in your own mind. If others' discipline is bad or they are not good monks, this is not for you to judge. You will not discover wisdom watching others. Monks' discipline is a tool to use for your own meditation. It is not a weapon to use to criticize or find fault. No one can do your practice for you, nor can you do practice for anyone else. Just be mindful of your own doings. This is the way to practice.

Q : I have been extremely careful to practise sense restraint. I always keep my eyes lowered and am mindful of every little action I do. When eating, for example, I take a long time and try to see each touch: chewing, tasting, swallowing, etc. I take each step very deliberately and carefully. Am I practising properly?

A : Sense restraint is proper practice. We should be mindful of it throughout the day. But don't overdo it! Walk and eat and act naturally. And then develop natural mindfulness of what is going on within yourself. Don't force your meditation nor force yourself into awkward patterns. This is another form of craving. Be patient; patience and endurance are necessary. If you act naturally and are mindful, wisdom will come naturally too.

Q : Is it necessary to sit for very long stretches?

A : No, sitting for hours on end is not necessary. Some people think that the longer you can sit, the wiser you must be. I have seen chickens sit on their nests for days on end! Wisdom comes from being mindful in all postures. Your practice should begin as you awaken in the morning. It should continue until you fall

asleep. Don't be concerned about how long you can sit. What is important is only that you keep watchful whether you are working or sitting or going to the bathroom.

Each person has their own natural pace. Some of you will die at age fifty, some at age sixty-five, and some at age ninety. So, too, your practice will not be all identical. Don't think or worry about this. Try to be mindful and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become quieter and quieter in any surroundings. It will become still like a clear forest pool. Then all kinds of wonderful and rare animals will come to drink at the pool. You will see clearly the nature of all things (sankharas) in the world. You will see many wonderful and strange things come and go. But you will be still. Problems will arise and you will see through them immediately. This is the happiness of the Buddha.

Q : I still have very many thoughts. My mind wanders a lot even though I am trying to be mindful.

A : Don't worry about this. Try to keep your mind in the present. Whatever there is that arises in the mind, just watch it. Let go of it. Don't even wish to be rid of thoughts. Then the mind will reach its natural state. No discriminating between good and bad, hot and cold, fast and slow. No me and no you, no self at all. Just what there is. When you walk on alms-round, no need to do anything special. Simply walk and see what there is. No need to cling to isolation or seclusion. Wherever you are, know yourself by being natural and watching. If doubts arise, watch them come and go. It's very simple. Hold on to nothing.

It is as though you are walking down a road. Periodically you will run into obstacles. When you meet defilements, just see them and just overcome them by letting go of them. Don't think about the obstacles you have passed already. Don't worry about those you have not yet seen. Stick to the present. Don't be concerned about the length of the road or about the destination. Everything is changing. Whatever you pass, do not cling to it. Eventually the mind will reach its natural balance where practice is automatic. All things will come and go of themselves.

Q : Have you ever looked at the Platform Sutra of the 6th Patriarch, Hui Neng?

A : Hui Neng's wisdom is very keen. It is very profound teaching, not easy for beginners to understand. But if you practise with our discipline and with patience, if you practise not-clinging, you will eventually understand. Once I had a disciple who stayed in a grass-roofed hut. It rained often that rainy season and one day a strong wind blew off half the roof. He did not bother to fix it, just let it rain in. Several days passed and I asked him about his hut. He said he was practising not-clinging. This is not-clinging without wisdom. It is about the same as the equanimity of a water buffalo. If you live a good life and live simply, if you are patient and unselfish, you will understand the wisdom of Hui Neng.

Q : You have said that samatha and vipassana or concentration and insight are the same. Could you explain further?

A : It is quite simple. Concentration (samatha) and insight (vipassana) work together. First the mind becomes still by

holding on to a meditation object. It is quiet only while you are sitting with your eyes closed. This is samatha and eventually this samadhi-base is the cause for wisdom or vipassana to arise. Then the mind is still whether you sit with your eyes closed or walk around in a busy city. It's like this. Once you were a child. Now you are an adult. Are the child and the adult the same person? You can say that they are, or looking at it another way, you can say that they are different. In this way samatha and vipassana could also be looked at as separate. Or it is like food and feces. Food and feces could be called the same and they can be called different. Don't just believe what I say, do your practice and see for yourself. Nothing special is needed. If you examine how concentration and wisdom arise, you will know the truth for yourself. These days many people cling to the words. They call their practice vipassana. Samatha is looked down on. Or they call their practice samatha. It is essential to do samatha before vipassana, they say. All this is silly. Don't bother to think about it in this way. Simply do the practice and you'll see for yourself.

Q : Is it necessary to be able to enter absorption in our practice?

A : No, absorption is not necessary. You must establish a modicum of tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind. Then you use this to examine yourself. Nothing special is needed. If absorption comes in your practice, this is OK too. Just don't hold on to it. Some people get hung up with absorption. It can be great fun to play with. You must know proper limits. If you are wise, then you will know the uses and limitations of absorption, just as you know the limitations of children versus adults.

Q : Why do we follow the ascetic rules such as only eating out of our alms bowls?

A : The ascetic precepts are to help us cut defilement. By following the ones such as eating out of our alms bowls we can be more mindful of our food as medicine. If we have no defilements, then it does not matter how we eat. But here we use the form to make our practice simple. The Buddha did not make the ascetic precepts necessary for all monks, but he allowed them for those who wished to practise strictly. They add to our outward discipline and thereby help increase our mental resolve and strength. These rules are to be kept for yourself. Don't watch how others practise. Watch your own mind and see what is beneficial for you. The rule that we must take whatever meditation hut assigned to us is a similarly helpful discipline. It keeps monks from being attached to their dwelling place. If they go away and return, they must take a new dwelling. This is our practice - not to cling to anything.

Q : If putting everything together in our bowls is important, why don't you as a teacher do it yourself? Don't you feel it is important for the teacher to set an example?

A : Yes, it is true, a teacher should set an example for his disciples. I don't mind that you criticize me. Ask whatever you wish. But it is important that you do not cling to the teacher. If I were absolutely perfect in outward form, it would be terrible. You would all be too attached to me. Even the Buddha would sometimes tell his disciples to do one thing and then do another himself. You should watch your own reactions. Do you think it

is possible that I keep some food out of my bowl in dishes to feed the laymen who work around the temple?

Wisdom is for yourself to watch and develop. Take from the teacher what is good. Be aware of your own practice. If I am resting while you must all sit up, does this make you angry? If I call the color blue, red or say that male is female, don't follow me blindly.

One of my teachers ate very fast. He made noises as he ate. Yet he told us to eat slowly and mindfully. I used to watch him and get very upset. I suffered, but he didn't! I watched the outside. Later I learned. Some people drive very fast but carefully. Others drive slowly and have many accidents. Don't cling to rules, to outer form. If you watch others at most ten percent of the time and watch yourself ninety percent, this is proper practice. At first I used to watch my teacher Ajahn Tong Raht and had many doubts. People even thought he was mad. He would do strange things or get very fierce with his disciples. Outside he was angry, but inside there was nothing. Nobody there. He was remarkable. He stayed clear and mindful until the moment he died.

Looking outside the self is comparing, discriminating. You will not find happiness that way. Nor will you find peace if you spend your time looking for the perfect person or the perfect teacher. The Buddha taught us to look at the Dhamma, the Truth, not to look at other people.

Q : How can we overcome lust in our practice? Sometimes I feel as if I am a slave to my sexual desire.

A : Lust should be balanced by contemplation of unattractiveness

of the body. Attachment to bodily form is one extreme and one should keep in mind the opposite. Examine the body as a corpse and see the process of decay and think of the parts of the body such as lungs, spleen, fat, feces, and so forth. Remember these and visualize this unattractive aspect of the body when lust arises. This will free you from lust.

Q : How about anger? What should I do when I feel anger arising?

A : You must use loving-kindness. When angry states of mind arise in meditation, balance them by developing feelings of loving-kindness. If someone does something bad or gets angry, don't get angry yourself. If you do, you are being more ignorant than they. Be wise. Keep in mind compassion, for that person is suffering. Fill your mind with loving-kindness as if he were a dear brother. Concentrate on the feeling of loving-kindness as a meditation subject. Spread it to all beings in the world. Only through loving kindness is hatred overcome.

Sometimes you may see other monks behaving badly. You may get annoyed. This is suffering unnecessarily. It is not yet our Dhamma. You may think like this: "He is not as strict as I am. They are not serious meditators like us. Those monks are not good monks." This is a great defilement on your part. Do not make comparisons. Do not discriminate. Let go of your opinions and watch your opinions and watch yourself. This is our Dhamma. You can't possibly make everyone act as you wish or be like you. This wish will only make you suffer. It is a common mistake for meditators to make, but watching other people won't develop wisdom. Simply examine yourself, your feelings. This is how you will understand.

Q : I feel sleepy a great deal. It makes it hard to meditate.

A : There are many ways to overcome sleepiness. If you are sitting in the dark, move to a lighted place. Open your eyes. Get up and wash your face or take a bath. If you are sleepy, change postures. Walk a lot. Walk backwards. The fear of running into things will keep you awake. If this fails, stand still, clear the mind and imagine it is full daylight. Or sit on the edge of a high cliff or deep well. You won't dare sleep! If nothing works, then just go to sleep. Lay down carefully and try to be aware until the moment you fall asleep. Then as you waken, get right up. Don't look at the clock or roll over. Start mindfulness from the moment you awaken.

If you find yourself sleepy every day, try to eat less. Examine yourself. As soon as five more spoonfuls will make you full, stop. Then take water until just properly full. Go and sit. Watch your sleepiness and hunger. You must learn to balance your eating. As your practice goes on you will feel naturally more energetic and eat less. But you must adjust yourself.

Q : Why must we do so much bowing here?

A : Bowing is very important. It is an outward form that is part of practice. This form should be done correctly. Bring the forehead all the way to the floor. Have the elbows near the knees and the palms of the hands on the floor about three inches apart. Bow slowly, be mindful of your body. It is a good remedy for our conceit. We should bow often. When you bow three times you can keep in mind the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, that is, the qualities of mind of purity, radiance and

peace. So we use the outward form to train ourselves. Body and mind become harmonious. Don't make the mistake of watching how others bow. If young novices are sloppy or the aged monks appear unmindful, this is not for you to judge. People can be difficult to train. Some learn fast but others learn slowly. Judging others will only increase your pride. Watch yourself instead. Bow often, get rid of your pride.

Those who have really become harmonious with the Dhamma get far beyond the outward form. Everything they do is a way of bowing. Walking, they bow; eating, they bow; defecating, they bow. This is because they have got beyond selfishness.

Q : What is the biggest problem of your new disciples?

A : Opinions. Views and ideas about all things. About themselves, about practice, about the teachings of the Buddha. Many of those who come here have a high rank in the community. There are wealthy merchants or college graduates, teachers and government officials. Their minds are filled with opinions about things. They are too clever to listen to others. It is like water in a cup. If a cup is filled with dirty, stale water, it is useless. Only after the old water is thrown out can the cup become useful. You must empty your minds of opinions, then you will see. Our practice goes beyond cleverness and beyond stupidity. If you think, "I am clever, I am wealthy, I am important, I understand all about Buddhism", you cover up the truth of anatta or not-self. All you will see is self, I, mine. But Buddhism is letting go of self. Voidness, Emptiness, Nibbana.

Q : Are defilements such as greed or anger merely illusory or are they real?

A : They are both. The defilements we call lust or greed, or anger or delusion, these are just outward names, appearances. Just as we call a bowl large, small, pretty, or whatever. This is not reality. It is the concept we create from craving. If we want a big bowl, we call this one small. Craving causes us to discriminate. The truth, though, is merely what is. Look at it this way. Are you a man? You can say 'yes'. This is the appearance of things. But really you are only a combination of elements or a group of changing aggregates. If the mind is free, it does not discriminate. No big and small, no you and me. There is nothing: Anatta, we say, or non-self. Really, in the end there is neither atta nor anatta.

Q : Could you explain a little more about kamma?

A : Kamma is action. Kamma is clinging. Body, speech, and mind all make kamma when we cling. We make habits. These can make us suffer in the future. This is the fruit of our clinging, of our past defilement. All attachment leads to making kamma. Suppose you were a thief before you became a monk. You stole, made others unhappy, made your parents unhappy. Now you are a monk, but when you remember how you made others unhappy, you feel bad and suffer yourself even today. Remember, not only body, but speech and mental action can make conditions for future results. If you did some act of kindness in the past and remember it today, you will be happy. This happy state of mind is the result of past karma. All things are conditioned by cause - both long term and, when examined,

moment to moment. But you need not bother to think about past, or present, or future. Merely watch the body and mind. You must figure karma out for yourself. Watch your mind. Practise and you will see clearly. Make sure, however, that you leave the karma of others to them. Don't cling to and don't watch others. If I take poison, I suffer. No need for you to share it with me! Take what is good that your teacher offers. Then you can become peaceful, your mind will become like that of your teacher. If you will examine it, you will see. Even if now you don't understand, when you practise, it will become clear. You will know by yourself. This is called practising the Dhamma.

When we were young, our parents used to discipline us and get angry. Really they wanted to help us. You must see it over the long term. Parents and teachers criticize us and we get upset. Later on we can see why. After long practise you will know. Those who are too clever leave after a short time. They never learn. You must get rid of your cleverness. If you think yourself better than others, you will only suffer. What a pity. No need to get upset. Just watch.

Q : Sometimes it seems that since becoming a monk I have increased my hardships and suffering.

A : I know that some of you have had a background of material comfort and outward freedom. By comparison, now you live an austere existence. Then in the practice, I often make you sit and wait for long hours. Food and climate are different from your home. But everyone must go through some of this. This is the suffering that leads to the end of suffering. This is how you learn. When you get angry and feel sorry for yourself, it is a

great opportunity to understand the mind. The Buddha called defilements our teacher.

All my disciples are like my children. I have only loving kindness and their welfare in mind. If I appear to make you suffer, it is for your own good. I know some of you are well-educated and very knowledgeable. People with little education and worldly knowledge can practise easily. But it is as if you Westerners have a very large house to clean. When you have cleaned the house, you will have a big living space. You can use the kitchen, the library, the living room. You must be patient. Patience and endurance are essential to our practice. When I was a young monk I did not have it as hard as you. I knew the language and was eating my native food. Even so, some days I despaired. I wanted to disrobe or even commit suicide. This kind of suffering comes from wrong views. When you have seen the truth, though, you are free from views and opinions. Everything becomes peaceful.

Q: I have been developing very peaceful states of mind from meditation. What should I do now?

A: This is good. Make the mind peaceful, concentrated. Use this concentration to examine the mind and body. When the mind is not peaceful, you should also watch. Then you will know true peace. Why? Because you will see impermanence. Even peace must be seen as impermanent. If you are attached to peaceful states of mind, you will suffer when you do not have them. Give up everything, even peace.

Q : Did I hear you say that you are afraid of very diligent disciples?

A : Yes, that's right. I am afraid. I am afraid that they are too serious. They try too hard, but without wisdom. They push themselves into unnecessary suffering. Some of you are determined to become enlightened. You grit your teeth and struggle all the time. This is trying too hard. People are all the same. They don't know the nature of things (*sankhara**). All formations, mind and body, are impermanent. Simply watch and don't cling.

Others think they know. They criticize, they watch, they judge. That's OK. Leave their opinions to them. This discrimination is dangerous. It is like a road with a very sharp curve. If we think others are worse or better or the same as us, we go off the curve. If we discriminate, we will only suffer.

Q : I have been meditating many years now. My mind is open and peaceful, in almost all circumstances. Now I would like to try to backtrack and practise high states of concentration or mind absorption.

A : This is fine. It is beneficial mental exercise. If you have wisdom, you will not get hung up on concentrated states of mind. It is the same as wanting to sit for long periods. This is fine for training, but really, practice is separate from any posture. It is a matter of directly looking at the mind. This is wisdom. When you have examined and understood the mind, then you have the wisdom to know the limitations of concentration, or of books. If you have practised and understand not-clinging, you can then return

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* see glossary

to the books. They will be like a sweet dessert. They can help you to teach others. Or you can go back to practise absorption. You have the wisdom to know not to hold on to anything.

Q : Would you review some of the main points of discussion?

A : You must examine yourself. Know who you are. Know your body and mind by simply watching. In sitting, in sleeping, in eating, know your limits. Use wisdom. The practice is not to try to achieve anything. Just be mindful of what is. Our whole meditation is looking directly at the mind. You will see suffering, its cause and its end. But you must have patience; much patience and endurance. Gradually you will learn. The Buddha taught his disciples to stay with their teachers for at least five years. You must learn the values of giving, of patience and of devotion.

Don't practise too strictly. Don't get caught up with outward form. Watching others is bad practice. Simply be natural and watch that. Our monks' discipline and monastic rules are very important. They create a simple and harmonious environment. Use them well. But remember, the essence of the monks' discipline is watching intention, examining the mind. You must have wisdom. Don't discriminate. Would you get upset at a small tree in the forest for not being tall and straight like some of the others? This is silly. Don't judge other people. There are all varieties. No need to carry the burden of wishing to change them all.

So, be patient. Practice morality. Live simply and be natural. Watch the mind. This is our practice. It will lead you to unselfishness. To peace.

Glossary of Pali terms

Ajahn (Thai)	teacher, from the Pali, 'acariya'.
Anapanasati	mindfulness of breathing
Anatta	not-self
Anicca	impermanence
Arahant	one who has reached the highest state of enlightenment
Bhikkhu	Buddhist monk
Cankama	walking meditation
Dhamma	the truth of the way things are; the teachings of the Buddha that reveal that truth and elucidate the means of realizing it as a direct experience.
Dhamma	phenomena; mental objects
Dukkha	suffering, unsatisfactoriness; the inherent insecurity, instability and imperfection of conditioned phenomena
Kamma (Skt. Karma)	volitional action by means of body, speech or mind
Kammathana	meditation object
Khandas	'aggregates'. The five constituents of human existence: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and sense consciousness.
Mara	evil and temptation personified; the name of a powerful malevolent deity.
Metta	loving-kindness

Nama-dhamma	non-material phenomena
Nibbana (Skt. Nirvana)	the state free from all suffering and defilement, the goal of the Buddhist path.
Nibbida	disenchantment, world-weariness
Opanayiko	worthy of inducing in and by one's own mind; worthy of realizing; to be tried by practice; leading onward
Pañña	wisdom, discernment, understanding of the nature of existence
Parami	virtues accumulated over lifetimes manifesting as wholesome dispositions.
Samatha	calm, tranquillity
Samadhi	concentration, one-pointedness of mind, mental stability
Sampajañña	self-awareness, self-recollection, clear comprehension, alertness
Sankhara	compound things; component things; conditioned things; the world of phenomena; all things which have been made up by pre-existing causes
Sati	mindfulness, recollection
Sila	virtuous conduct, morality
Sutta (Skt. Sutra)	a discourse of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali canon
Tanha	craving; desires conditioned by ignorance of the way things are.
Vinaya	the Buddhist monastic code of discipline
Vipassana	insight

Nāma-dhamma	non-material phenomena
Nibbāna (Skt. *Nirvāṇa*)	the state free from all suffering and defilement, the goal of the Buddhist path.
Nibbidā	disenchantment, world-weariness
Opanayiko	worthy of inducing in and by one's own mind; worthy of realizing; to be tried by practice; leading onward
Paññā	wisdom, discernment, understanding of the nature of existence
Pāramī	virtues accumulated over lifetimes manifesting as wholesome dispositions.
Samatha	calm, tranquillity
Samādhi	concentration, one-pointedness of mind; mental stability
Sampajañña	self-awareness, self-recollection, clear comprehension, alertness
Saṅkhāra	compound things, component things; conditioned things; the world of phenomena; all things which have been made up by pre-existing causes
Sati	mindfulness, recollection
Sīla	virtuous conduct, morality
Sutta (Skt. *Sutra*)	a discourse of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali canon
Taṇhā	craving, desires conditioned by ignorance of the way things are
Vinaya	the Buddhist monastic code of discipline